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# REPORT ON THE MENCALLHELP2 STUDY

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By

DR MELISSA CORBALLY

AVIEJAY PAUL

DR AISLING CALLAN

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Trinity College Dublin  
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath  
The University of Dublin





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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

During the preparation of the report, the research team sought clarification about the meaning of terms relating to domestic violence and abuse within the database under exploration in this study. The following terms below are the working definitions of the terms used by Men's Aid staff during the course of their work in 2022.

*An Garda Síochána (AGS):* An Garda Síochána is Ireland's National Police and Security Service.

*Barring order (BO):* A barring order is an order of the court which requires the violent person to leave the family home. This order also prohibits the person from further violence or threats of violence, and from watching or being near the home of the applicant. A barring order can last up to three years.

*Coercive control:* Acts relating to obtaining complete control over partner (either within a relationship, as a form of second wave abuse, or post relationship) For example, not allowing a partner to go to work or school, restricting access to transportation, taking phone and changing passwords, not allowing partner to see family or friends without permission, not permitting partner access to money, threats of violence or violence in order to control, control over partner's social media. Complete control of partner.

*Economic abuse:* Any form of financial abuse, no access to money, not permitted to have your own bank account or access to your own bank card. All your funds going into a joint bank account that you cannot access. Being coerced or threatened into obtaining loans in your name but having to give the money to your partner. Your partner keeping all joint social welfare payment or pension.

*Emotional abuse:* Emotional abuse includes verbal abuse and criticising partners looks, body, criticising friends, family and name calling.

*Interim barring order (IBO) -* This is an immediate order requiring the violent person to leave the family home. It is issued only in exceptional circumstances and lasts until the application for the barring order has been heard by the court. After this point, if the applicant is successful, a barring order will take its place for whatever period has been ordered by the court, with an upper limit of three years.

*Legal orders -* Legal orders are granted where by the court if it believes that the safety and welfare of an applicant, or the safety and welfare of a dependant of the applicant requires that an order is granted. Safety and welfare includes both physical and psychological welfare. Legal orders covering domestic violence include protection orders, safety orders, interim barring orders and barring orders.

*Online abuse:* any form of abuse using social media to - damage character, make false accusations, upload private photos, continuously call, text, email, etc.

*Parental alienation:* This relates to emotional abuse of children. Not permitting access by creating a false sense of fear against the other parent. Withholding affection if the child wants a relationship with the other parent. Not permitting the child to speak about the other parent or extended family.

*Pet abuse:* Physical abuse of pets as a form of punishment if partner is disobedient. Threats to harm pets as a form of control. Threats to give pets away.

*Protection order (PO):* This is an immediate order issued while the applicant is waiting for the court to hear their application for a safety order. It has the same effect as a safety order but only lasts until the application for the safety order has been heard by the court. After this point, if the applicant is successful, a safety order will take its place for whatever period has been ordered by the court, with an upper limit of five years.

*Psychological abuse:* Gaslighting, hiding property, frighten mentally, deliberately confuse or influence thoughts, changing their sense of security, threaten to harm children or loved ones, embarrass in public etc.

*Physical abuse:* Any form of abuse that can physically harm - hitting, slapping, kicking, biting, poisoning, withholding medication, etc.

*Safety order (SO)* - A safety order is an order of the court which prohibits the violent person from further violence or threats of violence. It does not oblige the person to leave the family home. It prohibits the person from watching or being near the home of the applicant if they are not currently resident with the applicant. A safety order can last for up to five years.

*Second wave abuse:* Abuse that is initiated by the abusive partner but not enacted by them. It can continue when the victim leaves the relationship through online abuse, using the courts service, threats, using children etc.

*Sexual abuse:* All types of unwanted sexual touching, being coerced into taking part in unwanted sexual behaviour that they are uncomfortable with, being forced to engage in sexual behaviour against will. Threats to divulge private information.

## INTRODUCTION

Violence and abuse within relationships is a worldwide problem which has detrimental direct and indirect consequences. For example, the negative health effects on those experiencing it have been evidenced both nationally and internationally (Krug et al., 2002, Watson and Parsons, 2005). Violence and abuse can be experienced by any gender and at any age, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances. In Ireland, recent governmental initiatives such as the recent establishment of Cuan, our National Office for Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence in addition to recent legislative changes and an overarching strategic vision through a third National strategy (Government of Ireland 2022) signals clear intention towards resolving the enduring problem of violence in society. However, there remains a lack of data regarding male victimisation and as a result, a lack of understanding regarding aspects of service provision (such as services available to male victims of violence and abuse).

Within adult intimate relationships, many terms are used to define abuse which occurs within relationships. In this report the term, Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) will be used. This challenging and multifaceted problem resides within the intersections of many aspects of life in society. The gender (and sexuality) of the victim and perpetrator are two of the key influences of this experience (Government of Ireland 2022). Sometimes, beliefs about what constitutes 'abuse' and how abuse is 'classified' can affect victims in realising they are experiencing DVA within their relationship. This can be problematic as it can delay vulnerable individuals from seeking support. Because of the detrimental effects on those who experience DVA (and their children), it is essential that services charged with providing care to those experiencing DVA are responsive and sensitive to the needs of those who access vital support services.

Not all individuals who experience DVA seek support. However, for those who do, the role of support services are crucial as they interface with individuals at possibly the most vulnerable time of their lives. Telephone helplines and support services are an effective way of providing support to vulnerable individuals throughout the life span. Where violence and abuse are concerned, the support provided by the various Irish helplines provides essential (and sometimes life-saving) services, collectively supporting thousands of victims of violence and abuse annually.

Men's Aid Ireland is a national support service for men affected by DVA in Ireland. It provides a variety of support services including: a telephone helpline 9am-5pm (Mon-Fri), email support service, text support service, one to one support sessions, counselling services, outreach clinics in addition to promoting awareness about male victimisation and DVA through involvement in various education and training programmes nationally. They also launched the first LGBT+ education service in 2022 which has noticeably improved integrated service responses to same sex survivors of DVA nationally as well as meeting an internationally recognised deficit in services (Bates and Douglas 2020). This service continues to be evaluated positively led by a dedicated LGBT+ education officer who works with all

service providers. There is no doubt that support services play an invaluable role in responding to men experiencing domestic violence and abuse (DVA) nationally and internationally (Bates & Douglas 2020).

The first exploration of manual call data records and telephone call conversations undertaken in Ireland (the study was entitled MENCALLHELP) provided useful baseline data about demographic characteristics, details of DVA disclosed, and details of help-seeking callers made to the service (Corbally et al 2018, 2023). This initial study generated important information about the utilisation and characteristics of calls. Findings from this study were invaluable in generating important information about the utilisation and characteristics of calls as well as directly improving data collection practices and service provision. Changes to practices arising from this research evidence were adopted by Men's Aid Ireland improve the quality of this crucial service. Since its inception, Men's Aid have experienced an ongoing increase of calls. Additionally, a multiplicity of challenges relating to the DVA experience have been voiced by staff during ongoing discussions since the MENCALLHELP first report was launched. The culmination of these discussions resulted in a plan to revisit and explore again, data being collected by the service, ultimately culminating in this report. Central to the success of an impactful research project is a trusting and respectful symbiotic working relationship where all contributions and perspectives are welcomed and considered. The quality of the working relationship creates the conditions for sustainable, evidence-based service improvement.

Findings will inform service enhancement for vulnerable men and their families within this crucial service. It is our hope that the findings have resonance for every support agency in Ireland charged with responding to vulnerable individuals whether that is via prevention, protection, prosecution or policy to achieve the collective aim of the third Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Strategy a safer society for all (Government of Ireland 2022).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) is a serious societal problem which negatively affects those who experience it. Because DVA is largely viewed as a problem initiated by men and experienced by women, it is extremely difficult for men to seek formal help and support.

The MENCALLHELP 2 project explored in detail, the content, nature and characteristics of call data received by the Men's Aid National Helpline Service. This project used sequential mixed methods of inquiry to understand characteristics of those who contacted this service as well as exploring the nature of DVA recorded. This involved firstly analysing numerical data (quantitative) followed by text based (qualitative) data. Anonymous callers and missed calls were excluded from the study. 7132 contacts with the service were made during the study period which spanned one calendar year (January 1<sup>st</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022).

### **Findings from the quantitative (numerical) study**

- 1232 clients reported DVA experiences during the study period with 93.1% perpetrated by a female partner.
- The DVA experience for men consists of multiple forms of abuse with 85% of men reporting more than one form of abuse to Men's Aid Ireland. 73.1% reported 2-4 types of abuse with 11.9% reporting 5 or more types of abuse.
- Clients used multiple modes of contact with the service with almost all clients (93.6%) availing of telephone support.
- The most prevalent types of abuse identified were emotional abuse (86.1%), psychological abuse (69.3%), physical abuse (36.9%), coercive control (30%), parental alienation (26.3%) and economic abuse (20.3%).
- Clients who contacted Men's Aid Ireland more than once had 2.69 times higher odds of facing coercive abuse than those who contacted Men's Aid once.
- Clients who had children had 1.78 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse than those who do not have children. Clients who had children had 2.23 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse more than once than those who do not have children.
- Clients who lived intermittently with their partner had over twice the odds of facing emotional, psychological and physical abuse than those who were not living together. This group also had higher odds of experiencing multiple forms of abuse.
- Clients who were living together had 3.975 times higher odds of facing second wave abuse (abuse initiated by a female partner but not enacted by her) than those who were not living together.
- Clients who contacted the service more than once have 17.92 times higher odds of facing five or more types of abuse than a one-time contact reporting one type of abuse.
- The most common outcomes recorded by staff were empathetic listening (96.9%) and information relating to court, legal orders, family law (90.8%).

### **Findings from the qualitative (text based) study**

- Notes or records relating to 2200 contacts (e.g. email, calls, one-to one or outreach services) with the service were analysed.
- The experience of DVA was found to be complex and multifaceted. Multiple forms of DVA were expressed in text records. The most frequent DVA occurrence: psychological (17%), coercive control (13%) second wave abuse (13%), emotional abuse (10%) physical abuse (9%) and parental alienation (8%).
- Clients contacted the service at varying points in their relationships to legitimise their abuse experience as well as following the end of abusive relationships.
- Men contacted the service with multiple service needs. Fourteen different service needs were identified, the most prominent included: talk (34%), Information (21%), and legal related (11%).
- Men's Aid Ireland responses to men and their families were multimodal and tailored towards men's service needs. Information and legal related support and empathetic listening were the most common outcomes reported.
- The number of staff reported outcomes were more than double that of what is reported in quantitative data indicating that staff perform a broader remit of response to clients than previously thought.
- The health impact of DVA reported was mostly psychological.
- Contacts to the service are reporting more than DVA victimisation, there is evidence of Child to Parent abuse, Parent to Child abuse, Elder Abuse and Sibling Abuse.
- Concerned individuals are also contacting the services on behalf of men.
- Capturing the true extent of DVA for men remains challenging as language such as 'always' and 'for years' being recorded, even for one-off contacts.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that a national set of working definitions of all types and variations of DVA across genders be developed to ensure consistent comparison across agencies.

It is recommended that services pay particular attention to callers living in unstable living arrangements and callers contacting the service on multiple occasions due to higher DVA risks.

It is recommended that a caller ID or a reference code be given to anonymous callers to enable the potential development of a 'client' profile and to benefit from continuity of service and further analysis. Future research needs to explore this anonymous dataset as a priority.

It is recommended that future research examines health outcomes as well as how men and concerned others articulate the frequency, severity and escalation of the male abuse experience.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Domestic violence and Abuse (DVA) is a pervasive global health issue that exerts considerable pressure on health care and economic systems (Krug et al., 2002). This form of violence is, by nature, multifaceted, encompassing behaviours such as physical, psychological, and sexual violence, as well as controlling actions like isolation, stalking, and restricting access to healthcare, education, employment, or financial resources (World Health Organization, 2002). Although the experience of DVA varies for each victim, it carries profound and far-reaching impacts for those who endure it (Watson and Parsons, 2005).

For more than three decades, research has consistently demonstrated that men can experience domestic violence at the hands of their female partners (Corbally, Hine, Kestell, 2023; Douglas and Hines, 2011; Gelles 1974). Nonetheless, most countries, including Ireland, predominantly allocate greater resources to addressing male-to-female domestic violence, often overlooking abuse experienced by heterosexual and non-heterosexual men (World Health Organization, 2002). As a result, male victims are categorised as a 'hidden' victim group. This is because domestic violence has traditionally been framed as a gendered issue, predominantly affecting women, and often referred to as a 'female experience' (Corbally, Hine, Kestell, 2023; Hine, Wallace, Bates, 2022). Donovan and Hester (2015) describe this phenomenon as the "public story" which reinforces a rigid, gendered narrative of domestic violence. In this depiction, cisgender women (often portrayed as passive and physically smaller) are framed as victims, while cisgender men, depicted as dominant and physically imposing, are cast as perpetrators. These dominant narratives shape societal perceptions influencing how both the public and victims themselves understand and respond to such abuse. Other explanations suggest that domestic violence has traditionally been understood as stemming from men's desire to control and dominate, rooted in historically and socially constructed patriarchal values that reinforce and enable male privilege (Hine, Bates, Wallace, 2022). This has accumulated in a "gendered paradigm" (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005) which has contributed to an imbalance in research and policy, which continues to marginalize male victims and limit their access to support and resources.

According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), it is estimated that one in 10 men in the U.S. experienced sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner during their lifetime (Smith et al. 2017). In the UK, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics (2022/23) reveal that one in three victims of DVA were male, equating to 751,000 men (3.2%) compared to 1.38 million women (5.7%). Research in Ireland estimates that as many as 88,000 men have experienced severe abuse at some stage in their lives (Watson and Parsons, 2005). Although collected at different times, the quantitative data collectively underscore the prevalence of DVA among men. It can also be

understood that globally, the experiences of male victims highlight an under-recognized and under-researched issue.

Traditionally, this problem was conceptualised as a problem initiated by men and experienced by women. The ‘feminisation’ of this experience has resulted in men struggling with identifying themselves as victims of DVA and seeking help (Hine et al 2021). Studies investigating male victims’ experiences identify a wide range of abuses including physical, psychological and sexual violence, financial abuse, controlling behaviours including the use of children and destruction of property (Corbally, 2015; Hine et al., 2022; Javanoski and Sharlamanov, 2021).

## DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY

For several decades, scholars, researchers, and policymakers have been hindered by the absence of a universal definition and standardized terminology for discussing abuse within the domestic sphere. Terms such as Domestic Violence (DV), Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA), Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and Domestic Abuse (DA) collectively describe various forms of violence that take place within close human relationships. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, their meanings can differ depending on the context. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) refers specifically to violence perpetrated by an intimate partner within the context of a romantic or intimate relationship. In contrast, domestic violence is a broader term that encompasses abuse perpetrated not only by intimate partners but also by spouses, ex-partners, family members, or others within the household.

The term ‘domestic violence’ is widely used in Ireland in both colloquial and legislative contexts (Watson and Parsons, 2005). For example, the Domestic Violence Act 2018 came into effect in Ireland on January 1, 2019. This represented a landmark reform by introducing coercive control as a criminal offence, recognising the harm caused by emotional or psychological abuse. Our understanding of coercive control is largely shaped by the widely regarded work of Stark (2007), which highlights how perpetrators use a pattern of intimidation, isolation, and control to dominate their partners. His framework has been instrumental in shifting the focus from individual incidents of abuse to the sustained, cumulative impact of control over time, influencing both academic discourse and legal frameworks on domestic abuse. Section 39 of the Domestic Violence Act 2018 Act defines coercive control as persistent, intentional behaviour that is controlling or coercive, has a serious impact on the victim, and is behaviour that a reasonable person would expect to cause such harm (Department of Justice, 2022). This was previously accomplished in England with the introduction of the criminal offence of “coercive and controlling behaviour” in 2015 (Stark, 2018). Elsewhere, coercive control has been defined as an array of controlling behaviours. Those which fall under the umbrella of coercive include tactics such as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional abuse, property damage, humiliation, stalking, surveillance,

intimidation, social isolation and the restriction of a victim's freedom (Soliman, 2019; Walklate et al. 2022).

It was once assumed that coercive control was a tactic used exclusively by male perpetrators against female partners (Stark, 2007). However, recent studies challenge this notion. A 2021 national online survey in Australia, involving 206 male respondents, revealed that 62.2% had experienced coercive control from their partners. Among them, 158 reported humiliation and degradation, 169 experienced verbal abuse, 144 faced intimidation, and 160 were isolated from family and friends (Walklate et al. 2022). These findings not only challenge traditional assumptions about coercive control but also underscore the need for accessible and inclusive language when discussing dynamics of violence and abuse. Terminology plays a critical role in ensuring that those affected, as well as the services supporting them, can effectively engage with and understand the issues being addressed. While Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is the term most commonly used in academic literature, Domestic Violence or Domestic Abuse are the terms more frequently used by those who experience violence, as well as by support services. Men's Aid Ireland prefer to use the term Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA). For this reason, the research team adopted this term to ensure the language aligns with the expected readership of this report, which includes both service users and providers in Ireland.

Because of the variety of definitions and classifications for DVA, these inconsistencies make it difficult to compare findings across studies, complicating efforts to develop a clear and unified understanding of the issue, particularly for male victims. Ratified by Ireland in 2019, the Istanbul Convention defines "domestic violence" as "all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim." (Council of Europe, 2021). One common characterization of DVA is a pattern of repeated abusive and controlling behaviours within intimate or familial relationships, which may persist even after such relationships have ended (Department of Justice, 2022). In contrast, Sohal and colleagues (2012) define Domestic Violence as any threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, or financial harm. In their national survey of domestic abuse in Ireland, Watson and Parsons (2005) offered a more comprehensive definition, describing domestic violence as "a pattern of physical, emotional, or sexual behaviour between partners in an intimate relationship that causes, or risks causing, significant negative consequences for the person affected" (p.23). Acknowledging the patterns of abuse and their impact on victims has been crucial in understanding the diverse effects on individuals. Additionally, acknowledging that abuse exists on a continuum highlights how the severity of harm can vary based on factors such as duration, frequency, and individual circumstances.

Exploring the grey literature provides valuable insight into how Domestic Violence (DVA) is understood and conceptualized by stakeholders and those who represent the public of

Ireland. One such resource is the Citizen's Information website, an Irish government-supported platform offering accessible information to the public. It highlights that:

‘If a partner or an ex makes you feel scared, controlled or intimidated, you may be experiencing domestic abuse. There are many different forms of abuse. It can be physical, or it can be emotional, and it may have impacts that can or cannot be seen by other people. Abuse can happen to anyone at any age and in any type of relationship. It can happen to adults, and it can happen to teenagers. You don't have to be married or living with your partner for them to act abusively towards you’ (Citizen's Information, 2023).

Similarly, An Garda Síochána (AGS) defines domestic abuse as physical, sexual, financial, emotional, or psychological harm inflicted by one person upon a family member or intimate partner, whether current or former, regardless of gender or sexuality (An Garda Síochána, 2024). The strength of these definitions lies in their inclusivity and gender-neutral approach, which effectively encompasses the diverse forms of abuse experienced by individuals, irrespective of gender or sexuality.

The National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-Based Violence (Cosc) during its existence and the newly established Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Agency (Cuan) have pivotal roles in shaping Ireland's strategies to address these issues. The Third National Strategy. However, despite its comprehensive approach, places significant emphasis on “meeting the needs of women and girls” (Department of Justice, 2022, p. 6). This focus, coupled with the exclusive use of imagery depicting female victims on the cover and throughout the document, raises some concerns. To ensure that the lived experiences of men and other victims experiencing domestic violence are equally recognized, it is crucial to incorporate inclusive, gender-neutral language and imagery. Nevertheless, the 2022–2026 National Strategy also demonstrates strengths by explicitly acknowledging male victims and emphasizing the need for tailored, inclusive support measures.

## PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Determining the prevalence of DVA remains challenging due to inconsistencies in definitions and measurement methods (Krug et al. 2002). Inconsistent data continues to hinder resource allocation, legal frameworks, and support services, ultimately hindering the ability to address and prevent domestic abuse effectively. In Ireland, the most recent prevalence data (which is admittedly dated) relating to men comes from a national study conducted by the National Crime Council in collaboration with the Economic and Social Research Institute, titled ‘Domestic Abuse of Women and Men in Ireland’ (Watson and Parsons, 2005). This survey offers critical insights into the prevalence and impact of domestic violence across the country. A total of 3,077 telephone surveys were conducted, employing a definition of domestic abuse that considered both its context and impact. The severity of abuse was determined based on specific criteria, including reported physical injury, frequent occurrences, and whether

participants described feeling “very frightened” or “very distressed.” Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate that the abuse had a “major impact” on their lives which was classified as experiencing severe abuse. The findings revealed that 15% of women and 6% of men in the sample had endured severe abuse (Watson & Parsons, 2005). Based on these findings, an estimated 213,000 women and 88,000 men in Ireland had suffered severe abuse by a partner at some point. This study was significant as it provided the first national prevalence estimates grounded in research data in Ireland. Additionally, its recognition of male victims helped bring attention to female-perpetrated abuse, challenging assumptions about the gendered nature of domestic violence. However, a key limitation is that the study was conducted two decades ago and may no longer reflect the current prevalence of domestic violence in Ireland. This highlights a clear need for a new national survey to provide updated, comprehensive data on this issue.

A striking finding from the study was that despite widespread awareness of helpline services, only 7% of those who had experienced domestic abuse sought support through formal support channels (Watson and Parsons, 2005). This low level of engagement raises questions about the barriers preventing individuals of all genders from reaching out for help. In the case of male victims, understanding the specific factors that influence their help-seeking behaviours could be instrumental in shaping more effective outreach strategies (Watson and Parsons, 2005). Research indicates that men often face significant barriers to disclosing their abuse, including fears that law enforcement will not believe they are victims of domestic violence, concerns that their reports will not be taken seriously, and the fear of being wrongly accused of perpetrating the violence themselves (Jovanoski and Sharlamanov, 2021). As a result, men are less inclined to report cases of abuse due to concerns about social stigma, shame, embarrassment, and discrimination (Tsui et al., 2010). Services like Men’s Aid may benefit from targeted approaches that address such stigma and societal expectations, which deter male victims from seeking assistance. Enhancing efforts to encourage men to talk more openly about their abuse could lead to increased utilization of domestic violence services and greater access to necessary resources for those affected.

In recent years, domestic violence has become more prevalent, largely exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis, stemming from the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak, led to widespread illness and high fatality rates globally. Efforts to curb the virus's spread, such as quarantines and lockdown closures, further strained family and relationship dynamics, heightening the risk of domestic abuse. In other words, these measures created unfortunate circumstances that forced victims to remain in the home with their perpetrators. (Jovanoski & Sharlamanov, 2021). A systematic review examining men's experiences of domestic violence during the COVID-19 found that, for every three domestic abuse cases, two victims were women, and one was a man (Ononokpono and Uzobo, 2023 as cited in Warburton & Raniolo, 2020). The study also revealed that 28.4% of women and 13.6% of men reported experiencing domestic violence during this period. In England, the demand for help from men experiencing domestic abuse surged by 60% during the lockdown (BBC News, 2020). Similarly, in Ireland, incidents

of domestic abuse reported on PULSE and recorded by CAD increased by 20% during the pandemic compared to the same time in 2019 (Irish Mirror, 2020). Reflecting this growing demand for support, the Men's Aid Helpline in 2020 received approximately 5,500 contacts, with calls addressing various forms of abuse, including emotional manipulation, financial control, physical violence, and sexual abuse (Dublin Live, 2020). This highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased attention to domestic violence, particularly its impact on male victims.

## MASCULINITY AND TALKING ABOUT ABUSE

Gender is a universal factor in domestic violence, affecting a wide range of victims who express or perform their gender. These performances are shaped by a complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors, all of which also influence both the prevalence and the lived experience of domestic violence (Krug et al., 2002). When considering the role of gender, masculinity stands out as a particularly significant factor. Traditional notions of masculinity can shape societal understandings of domestic violence, often reinforcing harmful stereotypes and behaviours. Masculinity refers to the socially constructed ideals of what it means to be a man (Connell, 2005). These expectations impact how men behave, perform, and understand what it means to be masculine or feminine, as well as what is considered appropriate in terms of sexual orientation and gender (Goffman, 1990). In this context, when a man experiences abuse from a partner, it often challenges and disrupts his sense of masculine identity. This is because it conflicts with traditional views of strength, control, and dominance typically associated with masculinity (Eckstein, 2009; Connell, 2005; Corbally, 2011; Migliaccio, 2001, 2002).

Connell's (1995) theory of 'hegemonic masculinity' highlights that masculinity should be understood in the plural, as masculinities, reflecting the different ways masculinity can be expressed and practiced in society. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), masculinities are 'configurations of practice that are accomplished in social interaction' (p. 836). While there exists a dominant, idealised form of masculinity that men may aspire to, it is not the only expression of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity represents the dominant configuration of practices or qualities that uphold male dominance in a patriarchal society, supporting both the subordination of women and the marginalisation of other forms of masculinity (Connell, 2005). These masculinities are organised hierarchically, meaning not all men have the same level of power, and the power they hold is linked to their social position.

Hegemonic masculinity, a term coined by (Connell, 2005), provides valuable insights into how masculinity is understood and enacted, highlighting the relationship between power, dominance, and the extent to which men internalize societal expectations of manhood. Rather than being a uniform concept, masculinity is expressed in various forms, with some expressions being more socially valued and others marginalized. These ideas contribute to

the reinforcement of stereotypical beliefs about what it means to be a man. Research suggests that gendered stereotypes of masculinity often lead to the assumption that men cannot be victims of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) (Durfee, 2011). Because victimhood is strongly associated with femininity, a man who identifies as a victim may be seen as failing to live up to the expectations of what it means to be a "real man" (Migliaccio, 2001). The prevailing societal narrative often portrays men as the aggressive gender, with a widespread assumption that men are the perpetrators of abuse, particularly towards women, rather than the other way around (Donovan and Hester, 2015). For men reaching out to the Men's Aid helpline, this creates a challenging situation where they must navigate and reconcile two conflicting identities: that of being a "victim of domestic violence and abuse" and that of being a "man," as defined by societal expectations of masculinity (Connell, 2005).

As discussed earlier, while the literature on male victims remains limited, the available research offers insight into how masculinity influences men's recognition of domestic violence in their lives, as well as how it affects their willingness to seek help. Presenting as a male victim can be particularly challenging due to the stigma surrounding nontraditional gender expressions—how men behave and speak (Butler, 1990), as well as the broader stigma associated with the idea of men being victims of intimate partner abuse. There is limited understanding of how men discuss their experiences with DVA. However, an increasing body of qualitative research has begun to shed light on how men make sense of their experiences, particularly through their narratives and the language they use (Callan, 2024; Corbally, 2011, 2015; Allen-Collinson, 2008, 2009; Morgan & Wells, 2016; Eckstein, 2010).

Research on masculinity has led some scholars to argue that men who share their experiences of domestic violence (DVA) victimisation perform a form of marginalised masculinity (Migliaccio, 2001; Hines et al., 2007), as they often face ridicule from others. Men's accounts of abuse perpetrated by women are frequently dismissed as 'unbelievable' (Corbally, 2011, 2015) or 'forbidden' (Allen-Collinson, 2009) or are rendered invisible (Callan, 2024). In addition, it has been reported that such narratives are met with disbelief (Migliaccio, 2001). This occurs despite evidence, such as the research mentioned earlier, showing that men can experience severe domestic violence (Watson and Parsons, 2005).

Men are less inclined than women to adopt the label of "victim" (Corbally, 2011; Allen-Collinson, 2009; Migliaccio, 2002) because it conflicts with their self-perception and social position in society. Instead, they often frame their experiences of domestic violence through more socially accepted roles, such as being a father or husband. Research supports this, showing that men frequently use their identities as 'father' and/or 'husband' or even rescuer or fixer to discuss domestic violence, as directly identifying as a victim is often challenging (Callan, 2024; Corbally, 2015; Morgan and Wells, 2016). Understanding these alternative ways of articulating domestic violence can assist practitioners in recognizing and addressing this phenomenon among men. The qualitative phase of this research project may further

illuminate how men talk about and account for intimate partner abuse, particularly in the context of their interactions with the Men's Aid helpline.

Research on how men account for domestic violence is still limited, although this field is steadily growing. Existing studies primarily examine how men describe their experiences of abuse, often comparing these accounts with those of women (Migliaccio, 2001, 2002; Callan, 2024; Corbally, 2011, 2014; Allen-Collinson, 2008, 2009, 2016; Durfee, 2011). Men's narratives about domestic violence tend to mirror those of women (Migliaccio, 2002). Key themes that emerge from these accounts include feelings of "deserving" the abuse (Migliaccio, 2002; Eckstein, 2010), tendencies to generalize or minimize their experiences (Callan, 2024), fears of future violence (Migliaccio, 2002; Allen-Collinson, 2008), the normalization of abuse (Migliaccio, 2002), the belief that psychological abuse can be more damaging than physical abuse (Migliaccio, 2002; Watson and Parsons, 2005), and a tendency to rationalize the abuse they endure (Migliaccio, 2002).

When men do report abuse, research has shown that they as victims often receive minimal support from law enforcement and domestic violence agencies (Migliaccio, 2002; Corbally, 2011; Eckstein, 2010). Systemic factors have been identified as contributing to the exacerbation of abuse experienced by men, largely due to the failure of these institutions to acknowledge the validity of male victim's accounts of abuse (Migliaccio, 2002; Corbally, 2011). Moreover, men have expressed that the institutional forces meant to address domestic violence often perpetrate further harm, sometimes more so than the female abusers themselves (Eckstein, 2010). Additionally, men report that their abusive female partners are aware of gendered stereotypes and exploit these to their advantage, making statements that the men will not be believed and even falsely accusing them of abuse (Corbally, 2011, 2015; Morgan and Wells, 2016). In their phenomenological study, Morgan and Wells (2016) suggest that these false accusations are often readily accepted, perpetuated by deep-seated gender stereotypes.

#### MEN AND HELP SEEKING

When it comes to getting support, it has long been acknowledged that men are reluctant to seek help (Courtenay, 2000; Noone and Stephens, 2008; Bates and Douglas 2020). While the Men Call Help project is concerned with those men who do seek help, it is an important feature of the context surrounding this project that men in general are often reluctant to seek help. A number of reasons have been suggested for this, linked to societal expectations and masculinity. For example, Tsui et al's (2010) survey of an American DVA helpline staff found that men's reluctance to seek help was related to the societal expectation that men who called, thought that they should have been able to repel abuse and resolve the issues that they faced. This may have resonance for men who call (or perhaps don't call) the Men's Aid Ireland helpline.

As well as the issues surrounding societal expectations of masculine performance, Tsui et al (2010) found that the helpline staff believed abused men delayed from engaging in help-seeking because they believed that the services would not cater to them, might deny that the abuse happened, and would make them feel shame and embarrassment about seeking help. Men seemed to fear 'losing male identity' or 'being labelled as feminine', while denial was positioned as a form of 'self-defence', helping to preserve their masculinity (Tsui et al, 2010).

Help-seeking can expose men to further abuse. Corbally's (2011) Irish study of men's stories of DVA identified a phenomenon known as 'second wave abuse'. Second wave abuse is abuse not directly enacted by a partner and can relate to being rejected as victims upon seeking help. Men have reported that their intimate partner abuse experiences are met with derision or disbelief (Migliaccio, 2001; Corbally, 2011, 2014). In some instances, men expressed that they were believed to be the abusers themselves (Migliaccio, 2001; Hines, Brown and Dunning, 2007). Men have reported that the police would sometimes fail to respond if they called regarding an incident of intimate partner abuse or fail to take their claims seriously (Douglas et al, 2012; Buzawa and Austin, 1993). However, police have also been found to respond positively and helpfully to male victims of abuse (Corbally, 2011). Thus, while services, such as the police, may be guided by 'gender neutral' policies this does not always translate into 'gender neutral' service provision.

As well as some negative reactions from police, Hines, Brown and Dunning in the United States, (2007) found that services can also re-victimise men who contact them seeking help. Some men who call to seek help have reported being accused of being the batterer or even referred to batterers' programmes by intimate partner abuse agencies (Douglas et al, 2012). Although the research presented here refers to the United States, it can perhaps highlight the potential for secondary victimisation to occur and illustrate the importance of responsive support staff for vulnerable men.

There is very little research dealing with male help-seeking for intimate partner abuse victimisation, and none from an Irish context. The research that exists, from other contexts, provides some indication of where male and female abuse victims seek help as well as what factors may be related to where help is sought. Older men, men who reported that their children witnessed abuse, men who had a false accusation made against them, and men who experienced sexual abuse as children were more likely to contact an intimate partner abuse agency or helpline (Hines and Douglas, 2012). These findings again come from an American study and may differ from those generated in an Irish context. It is thus important to generate information about male victims of intimate partner abuse in Ireland as this may feed back into services allowing them to better serve the needs of this vulnerable group.

In Ireland, if a man is experiencing domestic violence and abuse (DVA) and seeks support, he faces limited options. For instance, men can access assistance only through services such as Men's Aid in Navan, County Meath, and the advice line provided by the Men's Development Network in Waterford. In the Republic of Ireland, there are only two national telephone

support services available to heterosexual men, compared to 28 services for women experiencing intimate partner abuse (Cosc, 2011). Additionally, while there are 19 refuges nationwide that provide accommodation support for women, there are currently no refuges offering similar services to men (Cosc, 2011).

In addition to services specifically focused on domestic violence, there are also 16 Rape Crisis Centres in Ireland that offer support for sexual violence (Cosc, 2011). While these centres report providing services to both men and women, the disparity between service availability and need is striking. According to Watson and Parsons' (2005) study, 15% of women and 6% of men in the Republic of Ireland have experienced severe intimate partner abuse. This highlights the neglect of male victims, as there are 2.5 times more female victims reported, yet 28 times more support services available to women than to men.

The recent extensive work undertaken by Hine et al (2022a, 2022b and 2022c) provides an extensive examination of collated data from 34,815 clients providing a useful overview of the profile of service utilisation from a UK perspective.

## HELPLINE STUDIES

Traditionally, there has been a relative dearth of research examining men's use of helpline services. Both the Male Domestic Abuse Support Service (MDASS, 2015) in Scotland and the Men's Advice Line (Debonnaire, 2008) in the UK have previously published detailed reports regarding the characteristics of calls to their helplines and how such calls are managed. The MDASS study was a retrospective analysis of call data from the first year of the service and took into account 217 new cases (the number of new clients, not the number of calls) that made contact with the service through telephone or e-mail (MDASS, 2015). The Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) was an interview-based study in which callers to the helpline were asked if their details could be passed on to the author of the study to facilitate their participation in an interview evaluating the helpline. 21 interviews were eventually carried out as a result of this recruitment process (Debonnaire, 2008). While the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) allowed the participants to reflect on their experience of the call, it was reliant on volunteer participants, which posed some difficulties, similar to those noted in relation to other helpline studies mentioned above. One such difficulty was the fact that it was sometimes deemed inappropriate to ask the caller to participate in the study as a result of the fact that they were distressed, for example (Debonnaire, 2008). The MDASS report (2015), by contrast, did not collect any additional data, making use only of data collected on calls and thus no feedback could be generated on the participants' experiences of the service.

Both the MDASS report and the Men's Advice Line study suggest that an effort was made in their studies to identify the extent of the abuse to which the callers had been subjected and whether they were victims of abuse or perpetrators. The MDASS report (MDASS, 2015) states that a 'client assessment tool' was made use of, by the call handler, in order to determine the

extent of abuse to which the caller has been subjected, whether the caller has also engaged in abusive behaviour and whether the caller is the primary perpetrator in the relationship. The Men's Advice Line study similarly attempts to account for the status of the participants, with the author of the research suggesting that in a number of cases it was difficult to determine whether the participant was, in fact, a victim of intimate partner abuse. Debonnaire (2008) suggests that the line between victim and perpetrator was unclear in some cases. Thus, the authors seem to suggest that the services are misused by men portraying themselves as victims in some instances. Both the MDASS report (MDASS, 2015) and the Men's Advice Line (Debonnaire, 2008) study collected data on ethnicity, age and sexual orientation. In both cases white, male, UK nationals were most likely to make use of the services (78% in MDASS (2015) and 68.2% in the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008)), which may be expected given the proportion of the population made up of this demographic group. However, the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) also found that a large proportion of callers to the helpline were non-white, and suggested that the proportion of non-white callers, at 31.8%, was larger than the proportion of the non-white population in the UK when compared to census figures. This may indicate that certain ethnic groups are more likely to use such helplines or that Domestic Violence and Abuse is more prevalent amongst particular ethnic groups. However, as the sample size for Debonnaire's (2008) study was small, such findings must be treated with caution. In both the MDASS report (2015) and the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) the majority of callers to the helplines were heterosexual, with 92% of the sample in the MDASS study (MDASS, 2015). In the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) none of the participants identified themselves as gay, although two were vague regarding the sex of their partner. Thus, it would appear that, despite not exclusively serving the heterosexual community, gay, bisexual and transgender men are unlikely to make use of helplines for men. Any action taken as a result of the call to the helpline (although it is unclear how it was identified that such actions were the 'result' of the call) in the Men's Advice Line study (Debonnaire, 2008) was accepted as an outcome. 73.7% of participants interviewed claimed to have taken some action as a result of their phone call with the helpline, suggesting that the helpline had some impact. As well as this, 90.9% of the callers believed that they were listened to 'well' or 'very well', while 68.2% of callers were either satisfied or very satisfied with the call. 90% of callers to the helpline also reported feeling better following the call (Debonnaire, 2008). The callers to the Men's Advice Line thus appeared to have a positive experience of the helpline.

More recent extensive research has been extremely encouraging and helpful in providing a more extensive exploration of men's helpline utilisation. Hine et al (2022) examined call data from a national domestic violence charity in the UK and found evidence of hesitancy from men in accessing the service and seeking support. Additionally, challenges with under-representation of LGBTQ+ men and disabled men were noted in this study. Clearly more research is required.

## SUMMARY

This literature review described the definitions and common terminology surrounding the phenomenon of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) against men. Additionally, the challenges of pertaining how social constructions of what it means to be a man can render male victims in a very difficult position in relation to seeking help were highlighted. The latest (though dated) research available indicates that 6% of men in the Republic of Ireland have experienced DVA (Watson and Parsons, 2005). DVA is a complex issue in terms of how it is defined and how these definitions are deployed in practice and research. This complexity, in conjunction with societal understandings of appropriate masculine behaviour has an impact on whether men see themselves as victims. Although there has been significant recent progress in relation to international research relating to men's helplines, there still remains relatively little research in the area of male victim helpline service evaluation. The following chapter describes the overview of the study and methodology utilised.

## THE MENCALLHELP2 STUDY

### STUDY AIMS

The MENCALLHELP2 study explored call data relating to Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) as recorded by Men's Aid Ireland for one calendar year (2022).

The objectives of the proposal were:

- To explore typical call characteristics
- To explore the nature and breadth of DVA documented
- To carry out exploratory data analysis to understand possible relationships and associations which might be present between variables of interest
- To explore how men articulate DVA

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopted sequential mixed methods of inquiry to achieve the aims of the study and provide distinct but complimentary perspectives regarding DVA experienced by men and the helpline support provided to them. This involved a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Phase one consisted of a quantitative retrospective analysis of call data collected by Men's Aid Ireland. This data, routinely recorded by staff at Men's Aid Ireland typically includes gender, age, nationality, marital status, living arrangements, number of children, perpetrator gender, call outcomes and types of DVA reported (i.e. physical, psychological, sexual, financial and coercive control). This ascertained how demographic characteristics, details of DVA disclosed, and details of help-seeking of the callers were recorded during the study period. The quantitative phase of the study analysed the characteristics of those who contacted Men's Aid Ireland. The study period spanned from the 1st of January 2022 to the 31st of December 2022. Phase two of the study consisted of a content analysis of call data recorded in a free text box within the database. The following sections provide further methodological detail regarding each phase of the study.

### ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study received ethical approval from the School of Nursing and Midwifery Ethics Committee. The quantitative study approval (REF 2357) was sought separately due to the fact that all data in this study was anonymised prior to analysis. Approval for the qualitative study (REF 3146) was more time consuming given the fact that client names were contained in the some of the free text boxes. A detailed data protection impact assessment was written for consideration by the Data Protection team at TCD. Ethical approval for the qualitative study was granted in September 2024. Part of the conditions of ethical approval process for the qualitative study required that all identifying information be pseudonymised (de-

identified). This time consuming but necessary process was completed in full accordance with the requirements.

Men's Aid Ireland operate a strict Confidentiality Policy to protect the privacy of data held by them about their clients. The data sources which were accessed in this study are recorded as a matter of routine by the service. In negotiating ethical permission to undertake this study, the researchers fully complied with both the parameters set out in the ethics application, signing and complying with the Confidentiality Policy throughout the study.

## DATA EXTRACTION AND MANAGEMENT

The data in this study was taken from the Men's Aid data base, facilitated by Zoho which was the software package Men's Aid use to routinely collect data. The data extract was taken between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022. A task is a record that is created in the Men's Aid database (Zoho) when a caller makes contact with Men's Aid. This record stores different information regarding the victim such as child protection referral, DV orders in place, subject (or how the contact was made with Men's Aid), types of abuse faced by the victim, relationship of the caller to abuse, perpetrator details, living arrangements of the victim etc. A single victim may have multiple tasks depending on the number of contacts made to the service for/by him. Some victims had same names. Unique victims were identified using name, age, county, nationality and other details mentioned in the tasks. Tasks for unique victims were then clubbed into single records using MS-excel. Thus, data sets at 2 levels were created: task-level and client level. 'Tasks' are synonymous with 'contacts' relating to the service and thus are higher numerically. In this report, Tasks and Contacts are used interchangeably. The research sought to explore the experiences of individuals who contacted the service also and as a result, a separate database for 'clients' proved useful for more in-depth analysis.

## DETERMINING THE FINAL STUDY SAMPLE

Not everyone who contacted the helpline in 2022 could be included in the study. The process of determining the finalised study sample required several steps as our understanding of the data collection process evolved. In our preliminary analysis, over 9,000 tasks/contacts were made to the service. However, upon careful inspection, it was necessary to delve into the detail underpinning these which resulted in the final number subjected to full analysis reducing significantly. The process of reaching a final dataset for full analysis required careful consideration. Several criteria for exclusion were applied. Firstly, clients in some recorded tasks did not want to be identified and therefore, their names had 'anon' either in the first name or in the second name or both. The tasks or contacts to the service classified as anonymous had to be excluded from further analysis because there was no possibility of ascertaining the number of clients associated with the tasks. At the next phase (client phase) we also identified some anonymous clients. All 'anonymous' tasks and clients were excluded from main data extract. This resulted in the exclusion of 2510 tasks from the main dataset. Secondly, missed calls (task n=1959) were also excluded. Thirdly, following a careful review

my Men's Aid Staff, 103 duplicate names were also removed from the dataset. Following this methodical exclusion process, the finalised number of tasks/contacts for 2022 was 7132 which related to 1837 unique clients. Both data sets were then uploaded into SPSS v27 for analysis.

Of these 1837 clients, information on type of abuse faced was missing for 605 (32.9%) clients. These clients were also excluded from the analysis because the analysis revolved around types of abuse faced by clients. Therefore, **the total number of clients in the final sample for quantitative analysis was 1232**. The number of tasks/contacts for this client group was 5791.

The process was slightly different for the qualitative analysis phase. Because of the nature of the free text export process, each entry was coded at the level of 'contact' and not 'client' (meaning 7132 data points). It became apparent that there were variations in the nature of the free text entries depending on the type of contact with Men's Aid Ireland. A further revision process was undertaken to further reduce this number by excluding types of qualitative free text data which were largely reportative (for example missed calls and text records). This resulted in a total of 6313 free text entries. The constraints outlined by the ethical approval process and the necessity to pseudonymise all of the dataset reduced the capacity for analysis. Time and staffing constraints also restricted the scope for qualitative analysis of the full dataset. As a result, the **total number of items analysed qualitatively numbered 2200**. Findings are presented in the relevant section below. The following table below provides an overview of the types of contacts which utilised the free text box function and also clarifies which types of data were included and excluded in the qualitative analysis process.

Table 1: Overview of the nature of contact, data and inclusion criteria for the study

| Subject/nature of contact | Nature of data                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Included in qualitative analysis |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 to 1 Navan              | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes                              |
| Call                      | Mix between brief and detailed description (staff perspective). There is a mix of admin logs and extensive entries detailing client's abuse, story/ situation and outcomes.                                                    | Yes                              |
| Court Accompaniment       | This category previously covered instances when Men's Aid provided court support services. However, these services are no longer offered by the organization.                                                                  | No                               |
| Dolphin House             | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes                              |

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |     |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Email              | Long detailed description (Client Perspective). This typically involves clients reaching out to share their stories. Staff perspective responses and replies are also included here.                                           | Yes |
| Missed Call        | Administration details only, focusing exclusively on essential information for record-keeping.                                                                                                                                 | No  |
| Other              | It says 'See letter in attachments' with no attachment. This category was not used.                                                                                                                                            | No  |
| Outreach Cavan     | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes |
| Outreach Drogheda  | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes |
| Outreach Dundalk   | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes |
| Outreach Galway    | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes |
| Outreach Waterford | Short but detailed description (Staff Perspective) usually a small paragraph detailing the one-to-one appointments. Topics include the client's story/ situation, description of abuse, the advice staff gave and the outcome. | Yes |
| Text               | Admin, texts detailing appointment times and dates only.                                                                                                                                                                       | No  |

#### WORKING DEFINITIONS OF DVA UTILISED BY MEN'S AID IRELAND

In the literature, there are a variety of definitions of DVA. In this study, we sought to utilise the definitions of Domestic Violence and Abuse as defined by Men's Aid Ireland. The following table below contains the working definitions utilised by the service

Table 2: Definitions of DVA utilised by Men's Aid Ireland

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Coercive</b> | Acts relating to obtaining complete control over partner (either within a relationship, as a form of second wave abuse, or post relationship) For example, not allowing a partner to go to work or school, restricting access to transportation, taking phone and changing passwords, not allowing partner to see family or friends without permission, not permitting partner access to money, threats of violence or violence in order to control, control over partner's social media. Complete control of partner. |
| <b>Economic</b> | Any form of financial abuse, no access to money, not permitted to have your own bank account or access to your own bank card. All your funds going into a joint bank                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

|                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                            | account that you cannot access. Being coerced or threatened into obtaining loans in your name but having to give the money to your partner. Your partner keeping all joint social welfare payment or pension                                                              |
| <b>Emotional</b>           | Emotional includes verbal abuse and criticising partners looks, body, criticising friends, family , name calling                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Online</b>              | Any form of abuse using social media to - damage character, make false accusations, upload private photos, continuously call, text, email, etc                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Physical</b>            | Any form of abuse that can physically harm - hitting, slapping, kicking, biting, poisoning, withholding medication, etc                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Psychological</b>       | Gaslighting, hiding property, frighten mentally, deliberately confuse or influence thoughts, changing their sense of security, threaten to harm children or loved ones, embarrass in public etc.                                                                          |
| <b>Second wave</b>         | Abuse that is initiated by the abusive partner but not enacted by them. This can include abuse that continues when the victim leaves the relationship through – online abuse, using the courts service, threats, using children etc.                                      |
| <b>Sexual</b>              | All types of unwanted sexual touching, being coerced into taking part in unwanted sexual behaviour that they are uncomfortable with, being forced to engage in sexual behaviour against will. Threats to divulge private information.                                     |
| <b>Parental alienation</b> | Emotional abuse of children. Not permitting access by creating a false sense of fear against the other parent. Withholding affection if the child wants a relationship with the other parent. Not permitting the child to speak about the other parent or extended family |
| <b>Pet abuse</b>           | Physical abuse of pets as a form of punishment if partner is disobedient. Threats to harm pets as a form of control. Threats to give pets away                                                                                                                            |



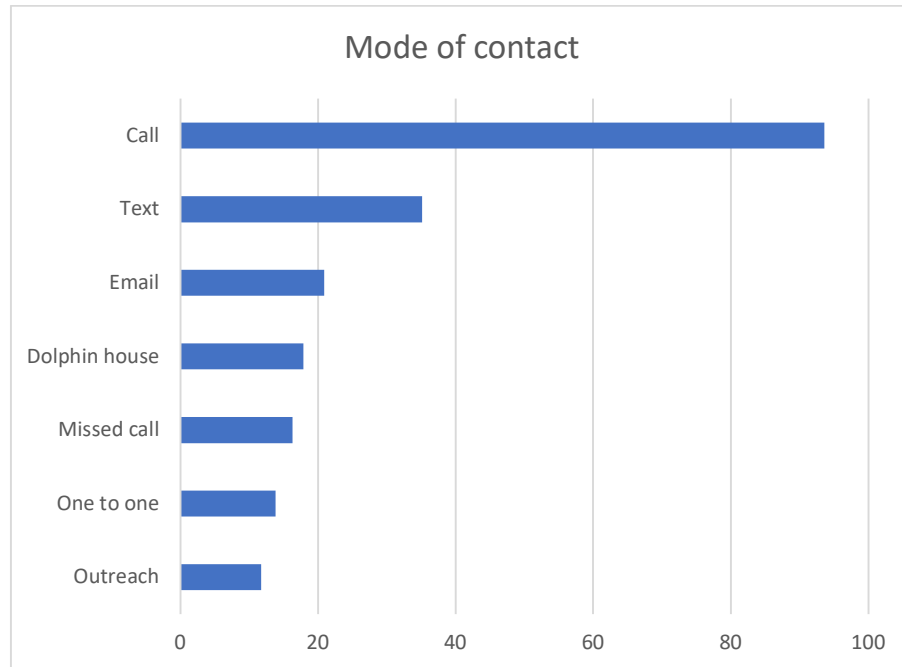
## FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As highlighted earlier, the final sample of clients in the final analysis sample (clients who contacted the service as well as providing information on type of abuse faced) constituted 1232 clients. The following sections provide the findings relating to this dataset and are presented mainly as percentages. In areas where there is missing data, the percentages represent the data available for analysis.

### MODE OF CONTACT

Because this data is at a client level, there is evidence of multiple modes of contact per client. The most common form of contact by far to the service with almost every client (93.6%) using the telephone to contact the service followed by text (35%), email (21%), Outreach Dublin (17.9%), one to one (13.8%), and outreach (other) (11.7%).

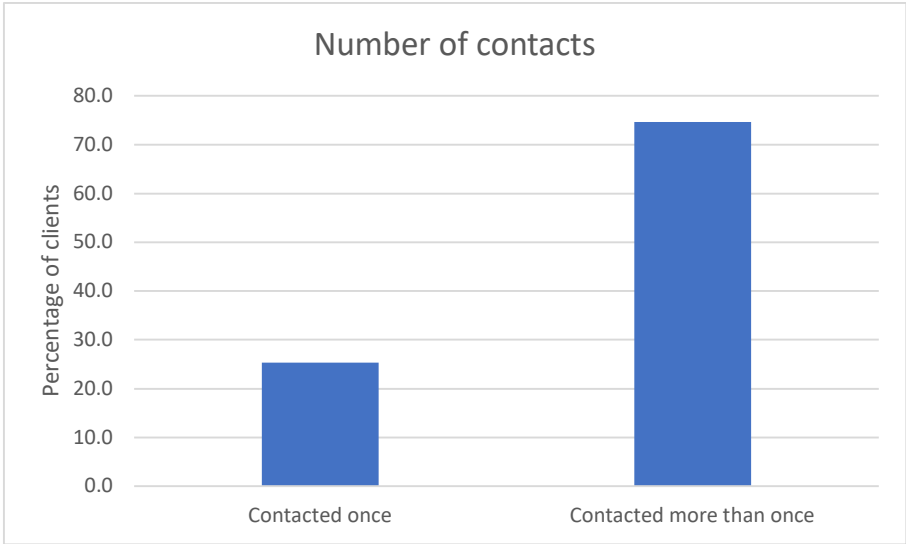
Figure 1: Mode of contact



### NUMBER OF CONTACTS WITH SERVICE

Almost three quarters (74.7%) of clients contacted the service more than once with the remainder (25.3%) contacting the service one a one-off basis. At the level of 'contact' – 60 nationalities were identified within the dataset.

Figure 2: Number of contacts



AGE

It is of note that 36.8% of the participants either chose not to disclose age or that it was not sought depending on the nature of the call. Of those who disclosed their age there was a wide age range with most clients being aged between 35 and 54.

Figure 3: Age of clients

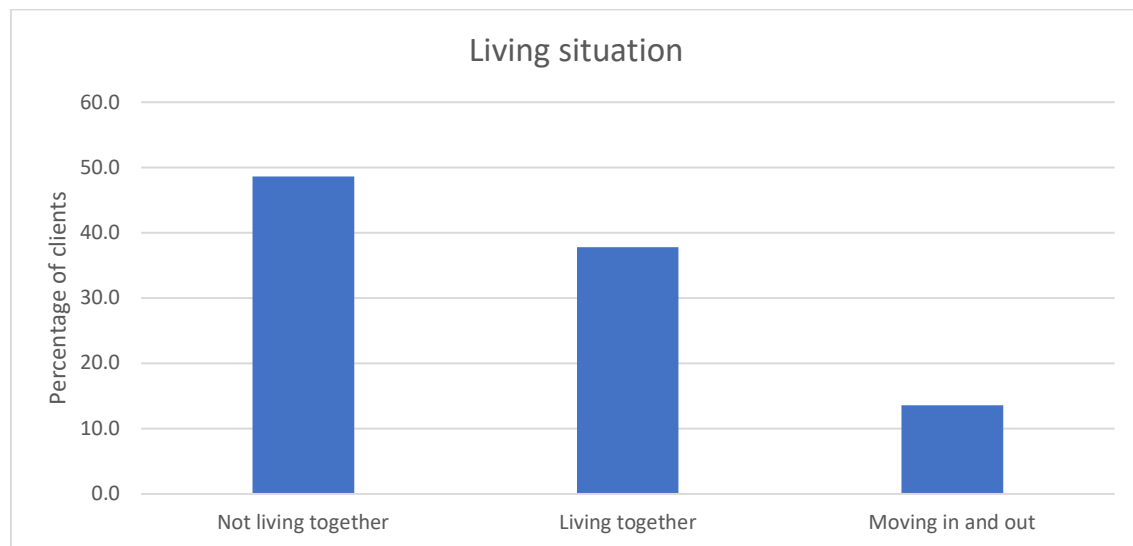


## MARITAL STATUS AND LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Of the men who disclosed their marital status, 56.1% stated they were married, 24.8% stated they were single. 4.4% stated they were legally separated and 2.8% stated that they were divorced. The remainder of this data was missing.

A clearer picture emerged in relation to living arrangements. 47% were living apart from their partner, with 36.5% living together. The remainder were identified both as living together and living apart for 2022. This was recoded as 'moving in and out' and constituted 13.1% of the cohort. This was deemed an important cohort due to the established risk inherent in leaving abusive relationships and formed part of a more detailed analysis discussed later.

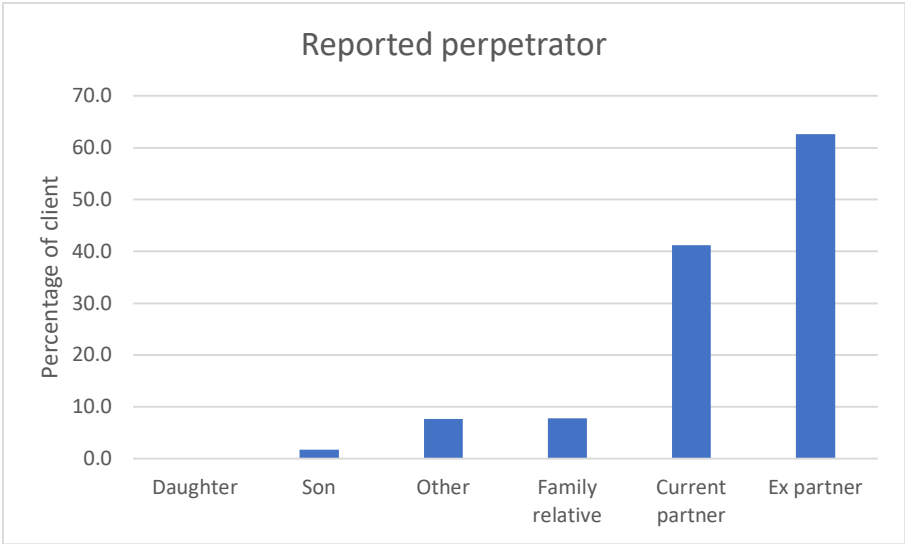
Figure 4: Living situation



## REPORTED PERPETRATOR

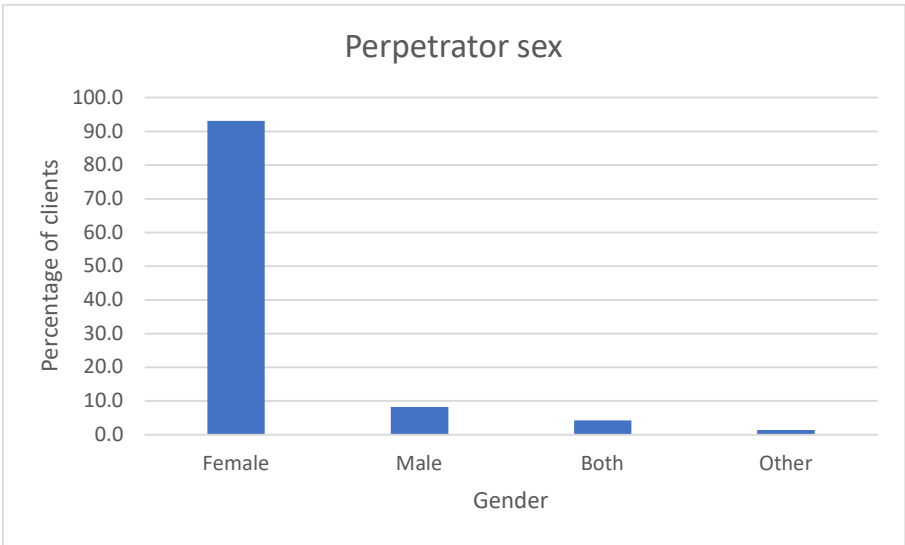
Most of the abuse reported was perpetrated by a current (41.2%) or ex (62.6%) partner with family relatives constituting 7.8% and others constituting 7.7%. Abuse from a son constituted 1.7% and a daughter 0.1%. Note that partner status may have changed during the study period (i.e. current partner may have become an ex-partner).

Figure 5: Reported perpetrator



Reflecting on the above findings, the perpetrator sex was almost exclusively female (93.1%) with 8.2% reporting male perpetration of DVA. 4.3% indicated male and female perpetration with 1.5% indicated as ‘other’ .

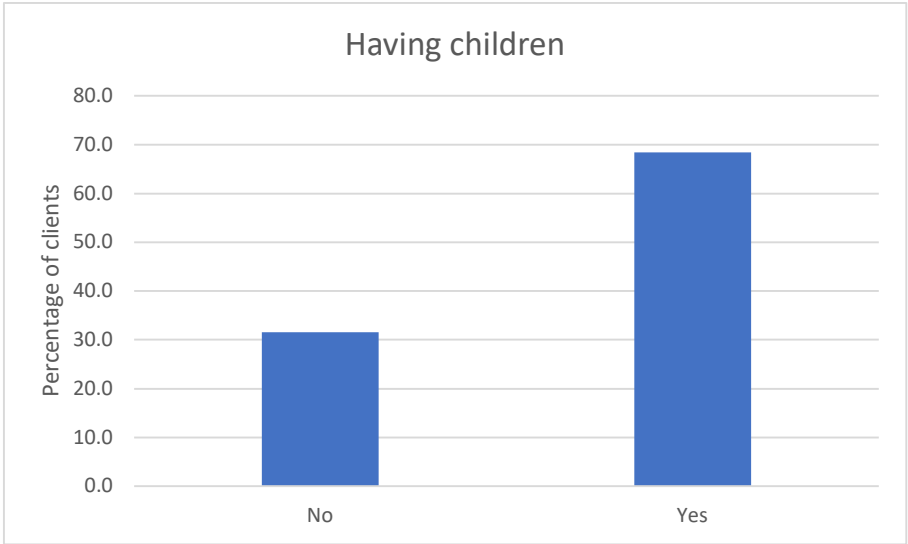
Figure 6: Perpetrator sex



HAVING CHILDREN

Whilst 159 individuals did not disclose their parental status, of those who did, 68.4% had children (were fathers) and 31.6% stating they did not have children. Having children was associated with higher odds of increased abuse and this was subject to further analysis presented later in the chapter.

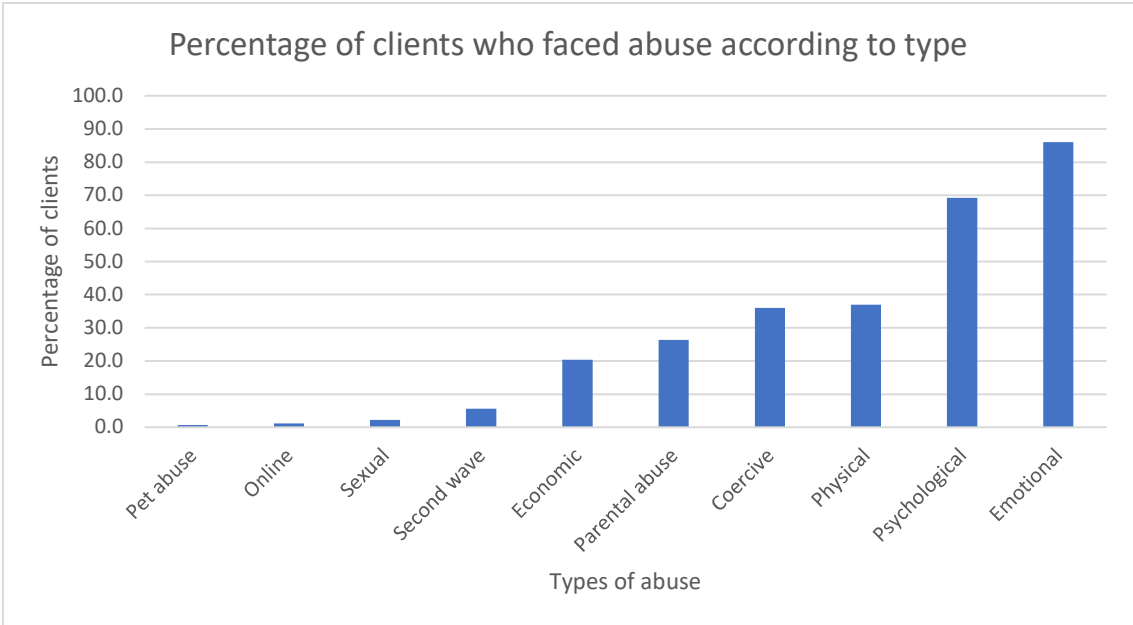
Figure 7: Having children



**PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS EXPERIENCING ABUSE**

A wide variety of DVA was experienced by clients contacting the service. As highlighted earlier, definitions of abuse as classified by Men’s Aid Ireland were utilised in classifying these. Note that most of the clients experienced more than one type of abuse. The most prevalent type of abuse experienced by clients was emotional abuse (86.1%) followed by psychological abuse (69.3%), physical abuse (36.9%), coercive control (30%), parental alienation (26.3%), economic abuse (20.3%), second wave abuse (5.6%), sexual (2.2%), online (1.2%) and pet abuse (0.6%).

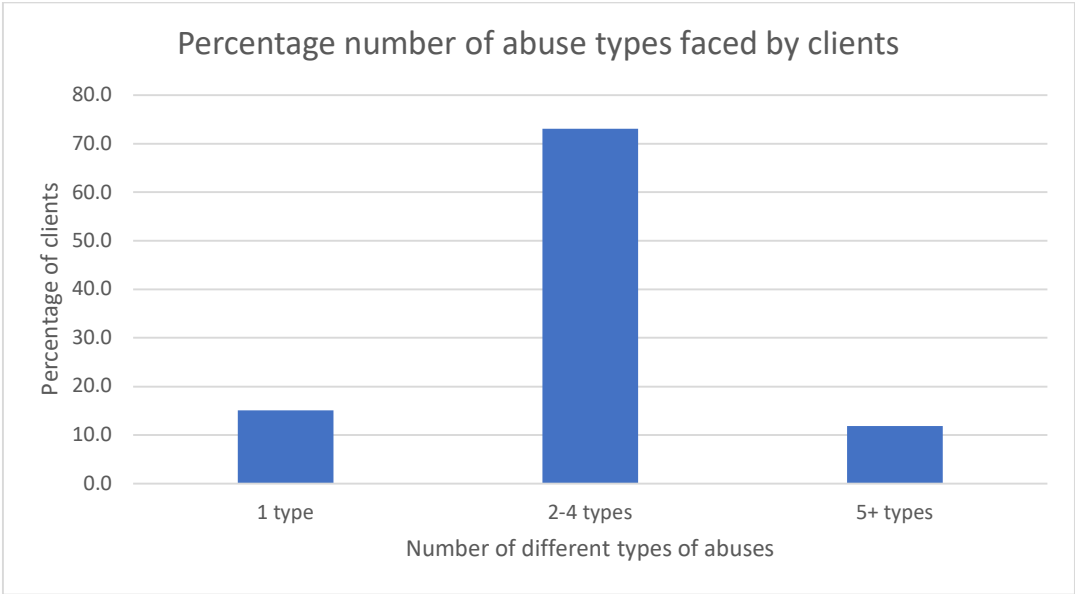
Figure 8: Percentage of clients who faced abuse according to type



**NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF ABUSE EXPERIENCED**

The multifaceted nature of the DVA experience was highlighted in this data with 85% of the client group reporting more than one form of DVA. 73.1% reporting 2-4 types of abuse with 11.9% reporting five or more types of abuse.

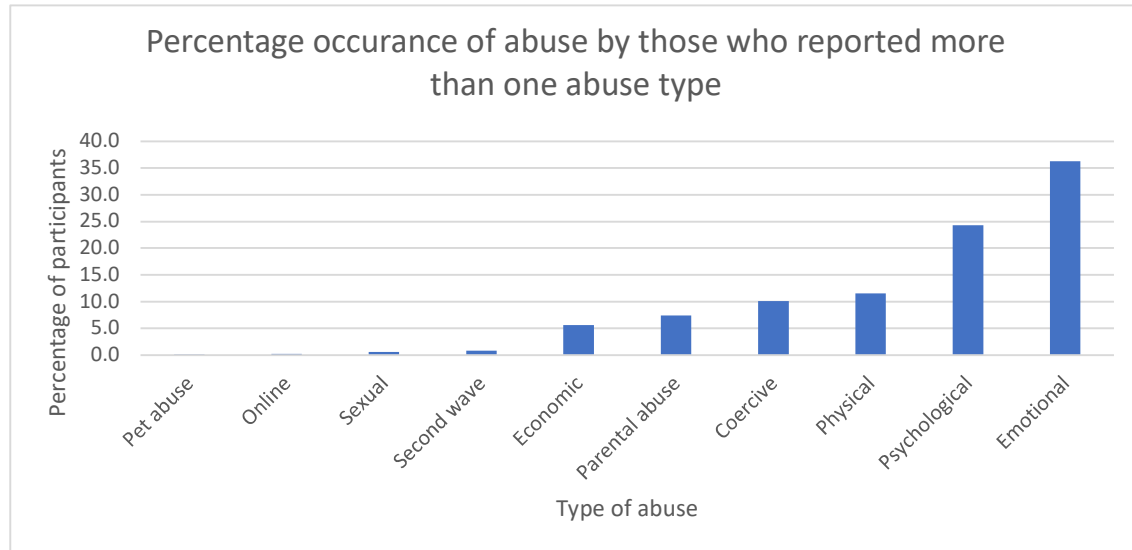
Figure 9: Percentage number of abuse types faced by clients



## OCURRENCE OF ABUSE BY TYPE (BY THOSE REPORTING ONE OR MORE FORMS OF ABUSE)

Of the 85% of men who experienced more than one form of abuse, the most frequently recorded occurrences of abuse by type were: emotional (36.3%), psychological (24.3%), physical (11.5), coercive control (10.1%), parental alienation (7.4%), economic abuse, (5.6%), second wave abuse (0.8%), sexual (0.6%), and pet abuse (0.1%). This broadly reflects the spectrum of DVA reported by clients contacting Men's Aid Ireland as illustrated above.

Figure 10: Percentage occurrence of abuse by those who reported more than one abuse type



## DOMESTIC ORDERS IN PLACE BY THOSE REPORTING ONE OR MORE FORMS OF ABUSE

19.2% of clients reported that an order was in place during their contact. A further breakdown of this percentage illustrates whether men were applying for these or if they were the respondent of these orders. Note that the figures also illustrate cross over orders.

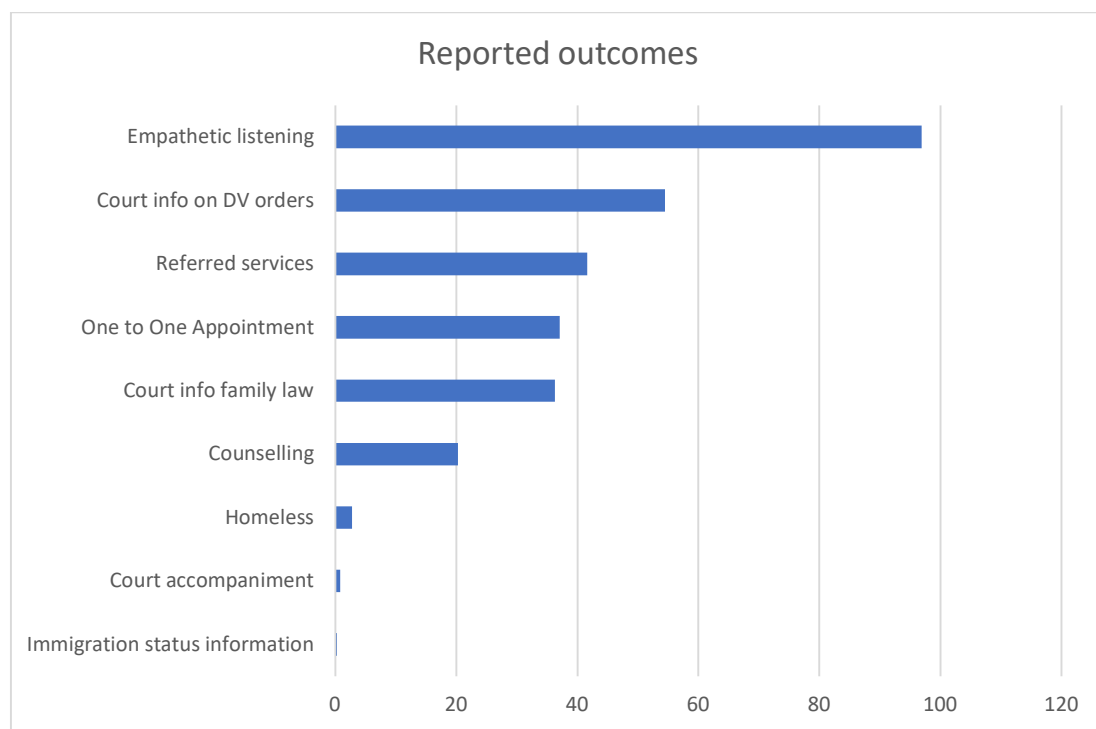
Table 3: Domestic orders in place by those reporting one or more forms of abuse

|                       | Total % | Applicant<br>(proportion<br>of total %) | Respondent<br>(proportion of<br>total %) |
|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Protection order      | 19.2    | 40.1%                                   | 86.9%                                    |
| Safety order          | 8.4     | 38.5%                                   | 86.5%                                    |
| Interim barring order | 1.3     | 18.3%                                   | 87.5%                                    |
| Barring order         | 4.9     | 30%                                     | 88.3%                                    |

## REPORTED OUTCOMES

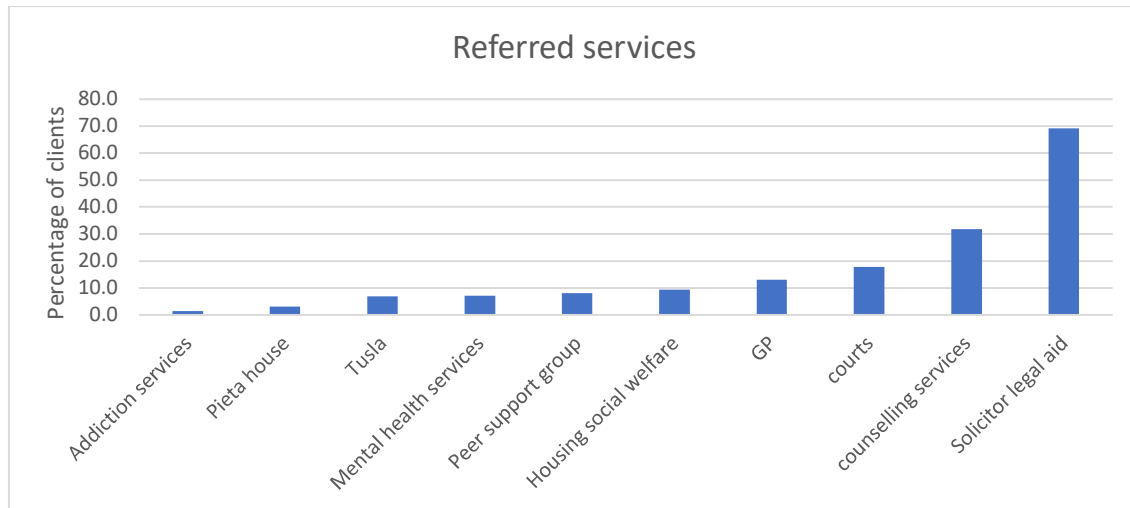
Men's Aid Ireland provided a variety of services to their clients. Almost every contact made by a client involved empathetic listening (96.9%) followed by information relating to court or domestic violence orders (54.5%). Information relating to court and/or family law was reported as being given to 36.3% of clients. Staff reported that they referred 41.6% of the clients to other services. Where one to one contact was necessary, 37.1% of clients received a one-to-one appointment, 20.3% received counselling services. 2.8% of clients were referred directly to homeless services, 0.8% received court accompaniment (a service now discontinued) with 0.3% reporting an outcome of giving information in relation to immigration services.

Figure 11: Reported outcomes



In relation to the percentage of clients being referred to other services (41.6%), the following figure provides an overview of where clients were referred to.

Figure 12: Referred services



#### MORE IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE DATASET

The team undertook further analysis to explore possible relationships between variables identified which were of particular interest to the team as well as Men's Aid Ireland. These involved more in-depth statistical testing. Some of the material reported here may be challenging to read, but it is important that the correct statistical language is used to explain what was undertaken.

Three key aspects we wanted to explore relating to abuse were as follows:

1. **Type of abuse:** A variable that records whether a particular abuse occurred or not. The different types of abuses as recorded and elaborated by Men's Aid is present in table 1.
2. **Number of times each abuse has occurred:** A variable that records whether a particular abuse has "occurred once" and "occurred more than once".
3. **Number of different types of abuses faced:** A variable that captures the number of different types of the abuses mentioned in table 1 faced by the victims. The categories in this variable are: 1 type, 2-4 types and 5+ types.

Because we were looking to see if there was any change in the above key DVA items, these were called 'outcome variables'. Once these were established, the team sought to explore if particular demographic aspects influenced any of the above DVA items. In other words, if any particular demographic aspect could predict any of the 'outcome variables'. These demographic variables were called 'predictor variables'.

The output variables (above) were analysed against the predictor variables (listed below). Both bivariate analysis and multi-variate analysis were carried out.

1. **Having children (yes/no):** Whether or not the victim has children.
2. **Living together status (answered 'yes' only, answered 'no' only, answered both 'yes' and 'no'):** Whether victim was living together with the partner or not or whether victim's living arrangement was alternating between living and not living with partner.
3. **Married (yes/no):** Whether the victim is married or not.
4. **Number of contacts made with Men's Aid:** The number of times the victim reached out to Men's Aid. 2 different versions of this variable were created. The first version has the categories in the form: made contact once/ made contact more than once. The second version of this variable has further drilled down categories in the form: single contact/2-5 contacts/6+ contacts.

### **Statistical analysis:**

The team undertook statistical tests called bivariate analysis as well as multivariate logistic regression analysis. The following section represents a brief textual representation of the key findings of this process to help with ease of understanding. The full statistical information and tables relating to these numbers will be published in a forthcoming publication by the team.

#### **ODDS OF FACING A PARTICULAR ABUSE: RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS.**

All of these results relate to multivariate regression undertaken relating to type of abuse as the outcome variable, adjusting for those predictor variables that had significant associations in the bivariate analysis.

#### **Number of contacts and the odds of facing a particular abuse**

Clients who were living together with their partners had 3.975 times higher odds to face second wave abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who contacted Men's Aid Ireland more than once had 2.69 times higher odds of facing coercive abuse than Clients who contacted Men's Aid once.

Clients who contacted Men's Aid Ireland more than once had 2.143 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse than Clients who contacted Men's Aid once.

Clients who contacted Men's Aid Ireland more than once had 2.033 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse than Clients who contacted Men's Aid once.

Clients who contacted Men's Aid Ireland more than once had 2.004 times higher odds of facing parental alienation than Clients who contacted Men's Aid once.

### **Having children and the odds of facing a particular abuse**

Clients who had children had 1.78 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse than those who do not have children.

*These figures are approaching significance:* Clients who had children had 1.31 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse than those who do not have children (p-value: 0.081).

### **Living together status and the odds of facing a particular abuse**

Clients who were moving in and out had 2.20 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were moving in and out had 2.25 times higher odds of facing physical abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were moving in and out had 2.17 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse than those who were not living together.

*These figures are approaching significance:* Clients who were moving in and out had 1.42 times higher odds of facing coercive abuse than those who were not living together (p-value:0.092).

Clients who were living together had 2.16 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were living together had 1.76 times higher odds of facing physical abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were living together had 1.45 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were living together had 3.98 times higher odds of facing second wave abuse than those who were not living together.

Clients who were living together had 0.19 times *lower* odds of facing parental alienation than those who were not living together.

### **Married**

Clients who were married had 1.70 times higher odds of facing economic abuse than those who were not married.

## ODDS OF FACING A PARTICULAR ABUSE MORE THAN ONCE: RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS.

All of these results relate to multivariate regression undertaken relating to the odds of facing a particular type of abuse more than once as the outcome variable, adjusting for those predictor variables that had significant associations in the bivariate analysis. Number of contacts is not included here for statistical reasons.

### **Having children and the odds of facing a particular abuse more than once**

Clients who had children had 2.23 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse more than once than those who do not have children.

Clients who had children had 1.67 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse more than once than those who do not have children.

*These figures are approaching significance:* Clients who had children had 2.27 times higher odds of facing economic abuse more than once than those who do not have children.

### **Living together status and the odds of facing a particular abuse more than once**

Clients who were moving in and out had 3.67 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse more than once than clients who were not living together.

Clients who were moving in and out had 3.12 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse more than once than clients who were not living together.

### **Married, and the odds of facing a particular abuse more than once**

Clients who were married had 1.46 times higher odds of facing emotional abuse more than once than those who were not married.

Clients who were married had 1.46 times higher odds of facing psychological abuse more than once than those who were not married.

## ODDS OF FACING MULTIPLE TYPES OF ABUSE: RESULTS OF MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS.

All of these results relate to multivariate regression undertaken relating to the odds of facing multiple types of abuse as the outcome variable, adjusting for those predictor variables that had significant associations in the bivariate analysis. Number of contacts is not included here for statistical reasons.

### **Number of contacts and the odds of facing multiple types of abuse**

Clients who contacted the service more than once have 17.92 times higher odds of facing five or more types of abuse than a one-time contact reporting one type of abuse.

Clients who contacted the service more than once have 1.88 times higher odds of facing two to four types of abuse than a one-time contact reporting one type of abuse.

### **Having children and the odds of facing multiple types of abuse**

Clients who had children had 3.36 times higher odds of experiencing five or more different types of abuse compared to clients without children who experienced only one type of abuse.

Clients who had children had 1.63 times higher odds of experiencing between two and four different types of abuse compared to clients without children who experienced only one type of abuse.

### **Living together status and the odds of facing multiple types of abuse**

Clients who were moving in and out had 5.74 times higher odds of experiencing five or more different types of abuse compared with clients who were not living together and experiencing only one type of abuse.

Clients who were moving in and out had 2.58 times higher odds of experiencing between two and four different types of abuse compared with clients who were not living together and experiencing only one type of abuse.

There were no significant associations found between clients who were living together and not living together in this case.

There were no significant associations found between clients who were married and not married



## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

### INTRODUCTION

This section relates to findings which related to the exploration of 2200 free text sections in the Men's Aid Ireland data management system. The purpose of this exploration was to examine the nature patterning and harms expressed by the DVA experience in free text format. The study sought to explore whether quantitative recording practices were sufficient to capture the full breadth of DVA experienced whether new forms of DVA victimisation (which are not currently captured using existing systems) could be identified.

The process of seeking ethical approval for this phase of the project and took over three months to secure. The granting of ethical approval required that the qualitative free text was pseudonymised (i.e. all identifying names/places relating to clients be removed). This process was laborious and although a text/replace command was utilised, it could not fully remove all name references. As a result, each data entry required manual review and pseudonymisation and this further impacted on the time available for coding and subsequent analysis as the research staff had to undertake pseudonymisation work prior to analysis.

A coding framework used for the project was designed in conjunction with Men's Aid Ireland to explore the following aspects.

1. Context
2. Men's Service Needs
3. The Nature of Abuse
4. Health Impact
5. Call Outcomes

Whilst initially, the research team began with utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytic framework, given the volume and nature of the data it was decided that a transition to a Manifest content analysis approach (Kleinheksel, A.J. *et al.* 2020). This was due to the volume and nature of the data, most of which (with the exception of some emails) was reportative and descriptive. NVivo version 14 was used for coding, data management and retrieval.

Of the 2200 entries, most of the qualitative data reviewed related to documented outcomes of call interactions followed by documentation of men's needs. The nature of abuse constituted approximately one fifth of the data reviewed. Note that 'context' in this sense relates to additional contexts accompanying the implied context of an abusive relationship.

The findings below contain representations of the proportionality of codes and content which emerged from the analysis process. The figure below illustrates the proportionality of the coding framework items within the 2200 free text boxes analysed.

Figure 13: Percentage of main codes in cases analysed

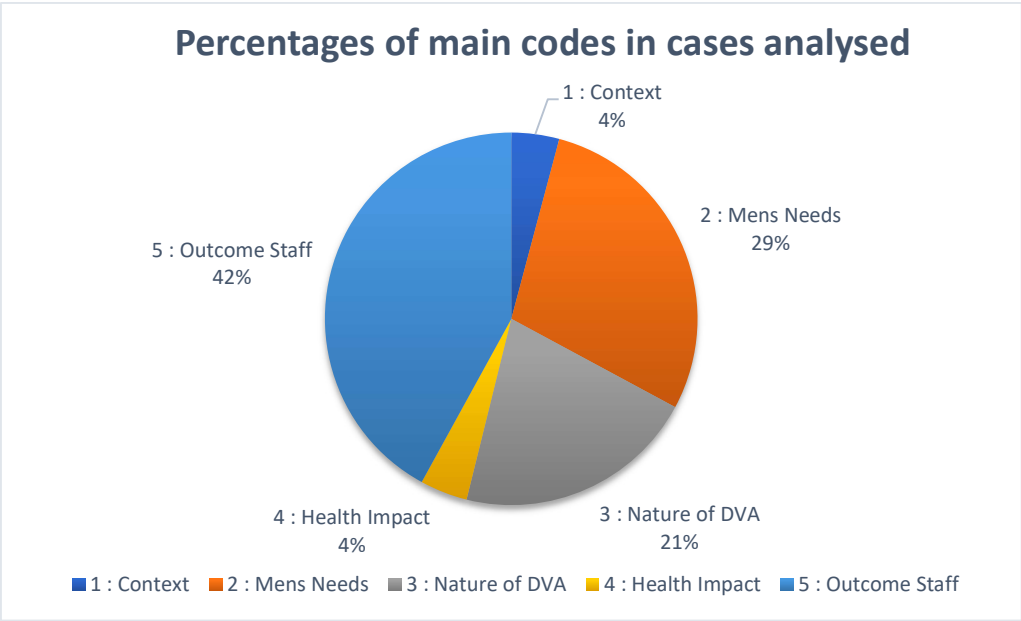


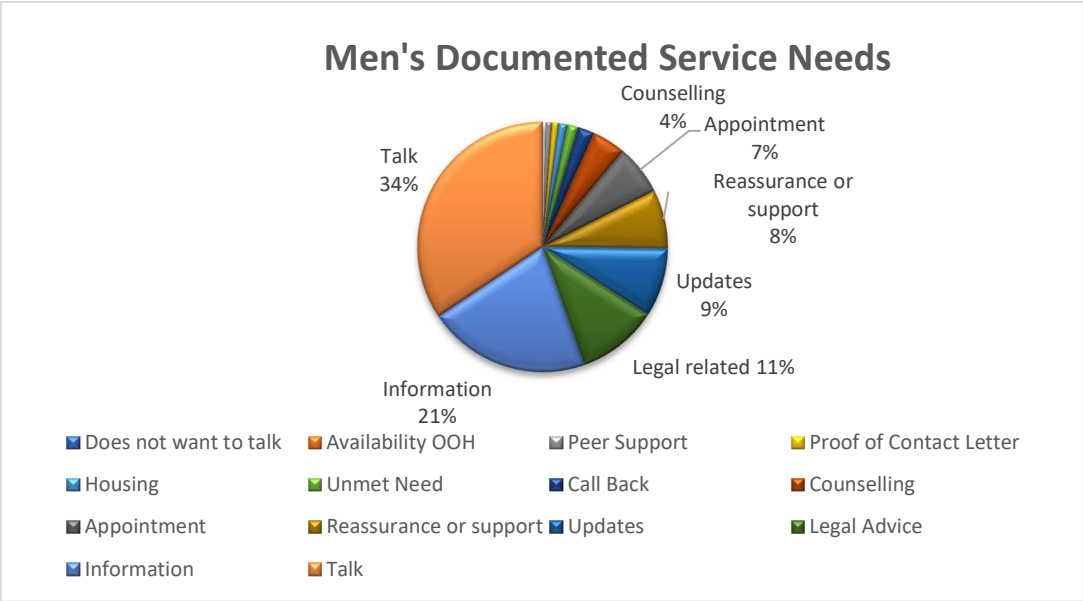
FIGURE 1 PERCENTAGES OF TEXT REPRESENTED BY THE CODING FRAMEWORK

The following sections provide more detail regarding each aspect below.

**MEN’S SERVICE NEEDS**

By far, the most prominent service needs identified for men was the need to talk followed by the need for information.

Figure 14: Men’s Documented Service Needs



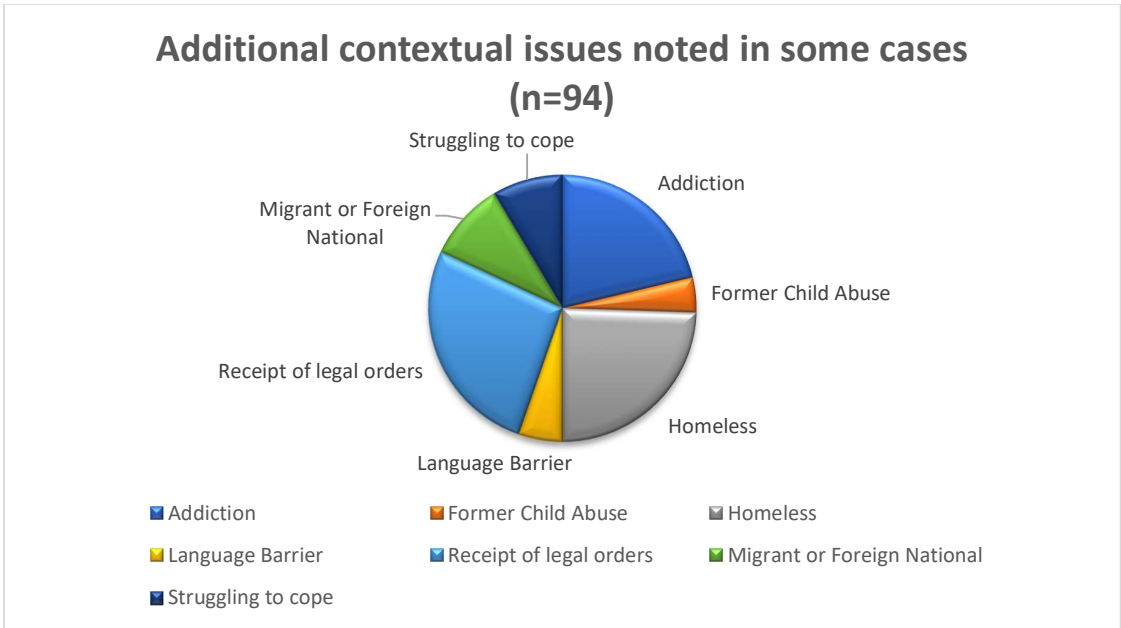
It was of note that men contacted the service to talk to Men’ Aid Ireland at varying time points in their relationship. Some men contacted the service to check if what they were experiencing constituted abuse. Some rang in contemplation of ending a relationship, some men were calling in relation to legal orders they had ‘summoned’ on them, some were in the middle of ‘court battles’ which had many forms including the breaking of legal orders by women and ‘cross over’ orders. How time was expressed varied across the accounts. Many accounts started used ‘for years’ and ‘all the time’ to explain the intensity and duration of their DVA. This was interesting insofar as at times this ‘for years’ datapoint formed only one contact point despite the duration of DVA. For example, “Has been in an abusive marriage for last 30 years, both verbal and emotional abuse, sometimes physical” was only a single contact to the service.

Contacts were seeking information about a wide variety of issues (including legal issues). Legal advice was coded Most of the information needs voiced by men related to legal issues and there was much overlap with ‘legal related’ which was where the word ‘legal’ was specifically stated in text.

**Additional Contextual Issues**

Men’s Aid Ireland is a service which provides support for men experiencing DVA and this is the primary context which is assumed when individuals contact the service. The term ‘context’ relates to other contextual issues raised by callers to the services which were in addition to the context of experiencing an abusive relationship. In the data analysed, there were 94 additional contextual issues which are represented proportionally below.

Figure 15: Additional contextual issues noted in some cases (n=94)



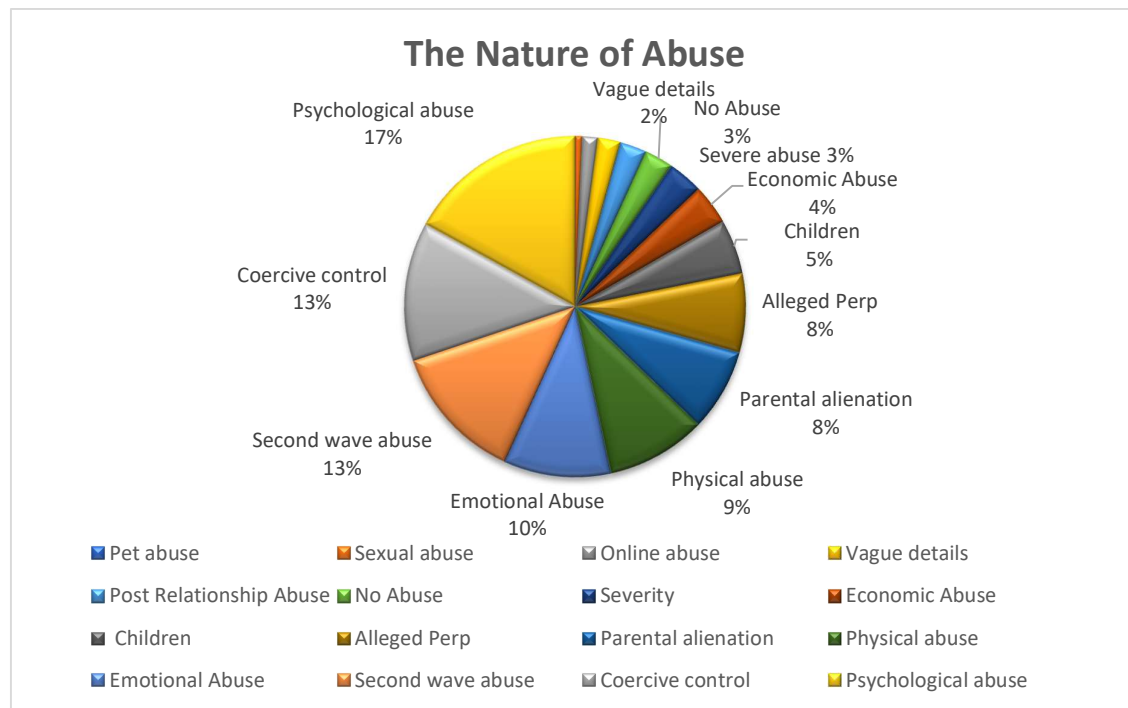
## THE NATURE OF ABUSE

A wide variety of abuse experience cases were coded with Psychological abuse being the most documented type of DVA experienced. Psychological abuse, coercive control, second wave and emotional abuse were most frequent type of DVA recorded. Most of the accounts (replicating the quantitative findings) contained more than one form of abuse such as the example below.

*xx said his wife has always been abusive to him and in [year] she knocked him unconscious, and he had to attend hospital he also obtained a PO but decided to drop the SO and try work on the marriage. xx said his wife sits him down and for hours tells him how bad he is and insults his family and his [relative] who has passed away. xx said he is the only breadwinner and his wife bursts into his office at home when he is trying to work or is on a zoom meeting. xx said his wife pushed him and last week and punched him in the head. xx said his wife has isolated him and he has no friends and can't tell his family. xx said his wife will not allow him visit his father in Dublin and spent last Sunday night verbally abusing him when he did drive to see his [relative]. xx said he had to leave his home last Monday as he could not take the verbal abuse any more. xx said his wife also hit him with her shoe and was pushing him because she found out he spent money on cigarettes. xx said his wife took his wallet and went through his phone. xx said he left the house after his wife hit him last Monday. xx said it was midnight so he took a blanket to sleep in the car. xx said he needed petrol but his wife had taken his wallet and cleaned out his bank account. xx said he decided to report the assault and theft of his wallet to Gardai. xx said he obtained a PO but has been sleeping in his car since as he is afraid to go home. xx said he does not want to seek a BO against his wife and does not want her in trouble or to have to leave. xx said he just wants peace and for his wife not to hurt him or interrogate him. (Call ref. 1299)*

For the purposes of the study, data was coded according to the coding framework in NVivo which broke down the abuse into the working categories outlined by Men's Aid Ireland. More detail regarding the particular aspects of abuse is continued below.

Figure 16: The Nature of Abuse



### Examples of psychological abuse

*xx said the verbal and the physical abuse started soon after they married, she has keys to the house he lives in now and he says she has smashed the house up when she is drunk she has smashed doors, TV and has broken most locks on the doors in the house, xx has been to the guards in his area (Call ref.355)*

*xx has split with his partner who was physically and psychologically abusive towards him and, Partner lives in England and comes home every few weeks, she managed to get keys to xx's house and has gone in and smashed doors and TVs, She also pulled a knife to xx in the past, xx said she becomes very Violent when she has alcohol (Call ref. 358)*

*xx called looking for support he told me his marriage is breaking down and his wife keeps saying she hates him. xx told me the emotional and psychological abuse is terrible he feels worthless. xx told me last week his wife said horrible things to him she told him she was sleeping around with other men just to hurt him. xx said that last week he had just had enough ended up with the G.P on medication because he was having a breakdown (Call ref. 2163)*

*xx said he has been married for years and had given up drinking before their marriage but that xx still uses his previous drinking to taunt him. xx said that she calls him names, shouts at him for no reason and regularly gets very angry. xx said he wonders if she is trying to provoke him into a response so that she can then get a barring order against him just to get rid of him from the home which is jointly owned. At one stage she came close to him with a kitchen knife when she was in a temper. xx said that she gives out if he spends 20 minutes in his garden shed and accused him of drug taking in his shed even though he never used drugs. xx said he then asked his G.P. to do a blood test which came back negative for drugs. xx said that he has spoken to his G.P., Talk to xx (local depression support group) and a*

*counsellor. xx was encouraged to continue to access all these support services which may help to improve his self-esteem being eroded from his wife's derogatory comments. xx said he still loves his wife and wishes to remain in the marriage and said he constantly asks her how he can help her. xx was encouraged to look after himself also as he said he does not eat properly and sometimes is nervous going to sleep if xx is angry (one to one ref. 2170)*

### **Examples of coercive control**

Data related to coercive control reflected coercive relationships during a relationship, continuing long after the relationship had ended.

*xx said his wife has always been controlling and abusive. xx said his wife monitored his movements and phone. xx said his wife has been financially, emotionally, verbally and physically abusive and on one occasion he woke up to a beating and had to be hospitalised. xx said Gardaí were involved. xx said Gardaí wanted him to press charges but he didn't want any more stress on them. xx said they have closed the case but he has a pulse number. xx said he was in counselling when he realised he was in an abusive marriage. xx said he told his wife he was leaving and she became more abusive physically, verbally and emotionally. xx said he left and is in shared accommodation. xx said he has agreed access two days a week to his children. xx said his wife has been abusing him online. xx said he met his new partner and his wife...said his wife has threatened to stab her and has contacted his work and sports club trying to have him fired. xx a fake Instagram account was set up where he and his new partner were abused online. xx said he has applied for mediation. xx said he has audio and voicemails, emails, texts of his wife threatening him and can feel that she might stop access as she is abusive when he is seeing the children. xx said he was seeing the children in the family home but his wife was abusive during these visits. (one to one ref 354).*

*xx said his wife has always been controlling and abusive. xx said his wife monitored his movements and phone. further says wife has threatened him with a knife twice in last several months ( date ) and threatened to kill him. Says has not previously done this in 25 years of marriage, says obtained PO followed by wife obtaining PO. Further says locks door on his bedroom. spoke about PO and court and Legal Aid/ Solicitor and complying with order and Gardai. Note referral by Gardai. (Outreach ref. 1090)*

*xx said a man who works on her farm is experiencing financial and mental abuse from his wife. xx said he is (in his late 60s) and his wife has all his wages and takes his pension. xx said she has spoken to him but he is afraid to take back control. xx said his wife calls him names and is verbally abusive. xx said they have plenty of money a farm and a house in Dublin that they are selling but he has no access to it. (call ref 1085)*

### **Examples of second wave abuse**

*xx told me she had him beaten by her cousin and when he was on the ground she whispered to him if he reports it to the Gardaí he will never see his children. xx also told me when the Gardaí are called, they remove him every time from the home (call ref.104)*

*There is a lot of foreign interference in our lives. My in laws would interfere in every detail of my life. and it was always negative input from their side with me being the accused. she would discuss almost every detail of our lives with her mother and sisters. her mother has actually threatened to kill me. I find it all very stressful. (Call ref. 106)*

*xx said he was attacked in his home a year ago by a person his wife-s boyfriend knows. xx said a man broke into his home beat him over the head with an iron bar and poured petrol on him telling him to stay away from her and stop making things difficult or he will be back. xx said the Gardaí could not catch the man and his wife's boyfriend had an alibi (call ref. 317).*

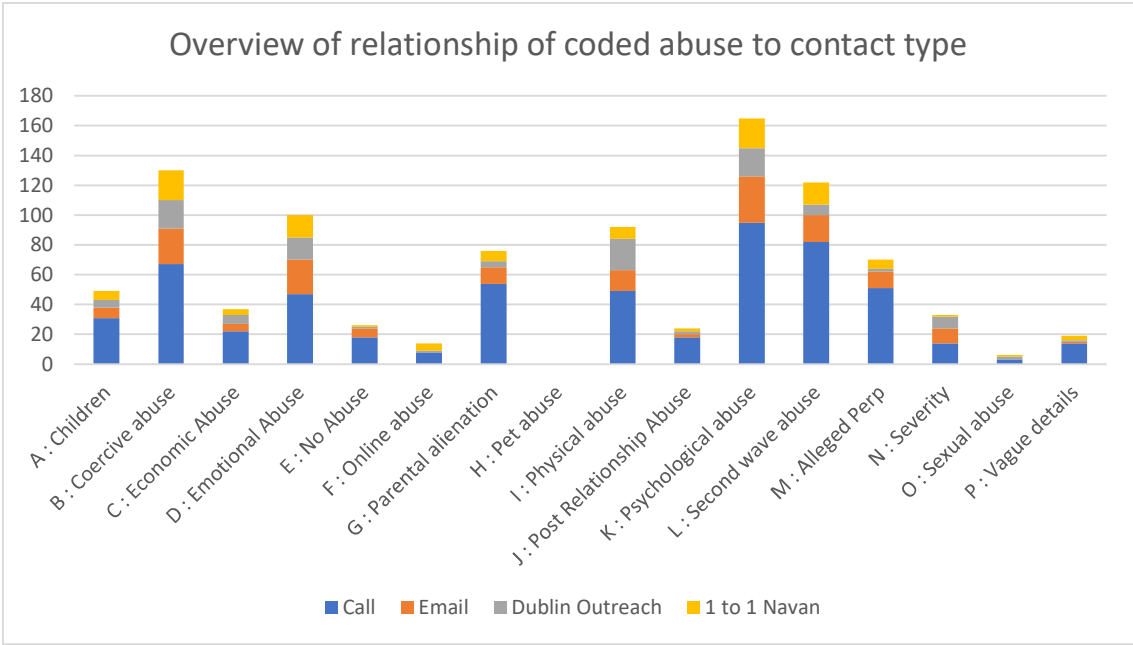
### **Examples of physical abuse**

*Please help me... I really need help I really really need help!!! I've been in a very violent relationship the past 3 years and am suffering so bad mentally from it. I'm at the stage where I feel I don't wanna be alive anymore I just want it all to end I was nearly kilt (killed) last time! I really really need help I've nothing left due to this relationship I am now homeless and am terrified she's gonna convince me to come back it's not gonna be the first time she's convinced me to come back and promised it won't happen again. the physical violence has went from a punch or two here and there to getting held down and smacked repeatedly over the head with weapon till I passed out. I need help so badly right now I have two beautiful kids I need to stay alive for. (email ref. 136)*

*xx said his wife has physically attacked him on 7 occasions - She was jailed a few years ago for attacking him and breaking all the windows in the house - xx has to go to hospital for text next week. He said his wife won't leave him alone. Xx became very upset on the phone (call ref. 8)*

We explored whether there was any relationship between the nature of abuse recorded and the nature of contact type. The following table highlights that calls and emails represented the most common means where abuse is articulated. The amount of physical abuse articulated in the Dublin outreach is also notable.

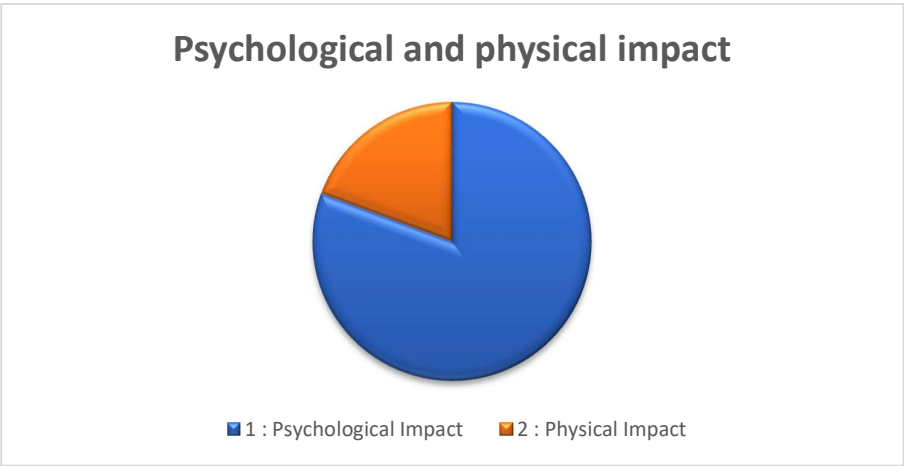
Figure 17: Overview of relationship of coded abuse to contact type



HEALTH IMPACT

Of the 98 cases where health impact was documented, most related to the psychological impact.

Figure 18: Psychological and physical impact



Example of Psychological impacts

*Called today as he was having a panic - anxiety attack and was afraid to return to his home as his wife was there, I stayed on call and encouraged calming and breath techniques , when calm I discussed with him that he should make an urgent appointment with his GP to assess these attacks*

*and possibly begin medication, xx apologised a lot for calling but stated he was scared, I assured him it was ok, he was very grateful (Call ref 256)*

*Had general conversation, says [man in 30s] yrs old married at [early 20s] with wife from teenage years , says in recent years wife has become coercive and controlling, calling him names ,berating and browbeaten and continuously put down, says is feeling lost, says came to a head last Fri when he took a high dose of tablets and was taken to hospital by ambulance...says has contemplated suicide before (Outreach ref. 454)*

*xx said his ex-partner was abusive to him while they lived together. xx said he was an emotional wreck and never knew what to expect depending on her humour each day. xx said he used to get knots in his stomach approaching the house every day waiting to see what was waiting for him at home after work. xx said that one day she might "love-bomb" him and the next throw the dinner and plate at him. xx said it was very hard walking on egg-shells the whole time. xx said that when they broke up, she turned their young daughter against him and therefore he lost contact completely with his child (now adult). xx said she also told both his family and her family that it was him that was the abuser instead of herself. xx felt that nobody would believe that the man was the victim so he did not discuss it with anyone who might help at that time but was glad that supports are now available for men. (Outreach Ref. 1394)*

#### **Example of Physical impacts**

*xx says was raped and got slaps from his ex-partner , says was recently arrested under mental health act following his recent disclosure and is attending B/Town hospital, says is engaging with a named garda , says [police] very supportive to him, says finding the experience difficult and would like counselling, says ex-partner has got PO, says not engaging with his family or friends only his mother who is in care....was emotional and cried throughout the time at the room.....(Outreach Ref 1534)*

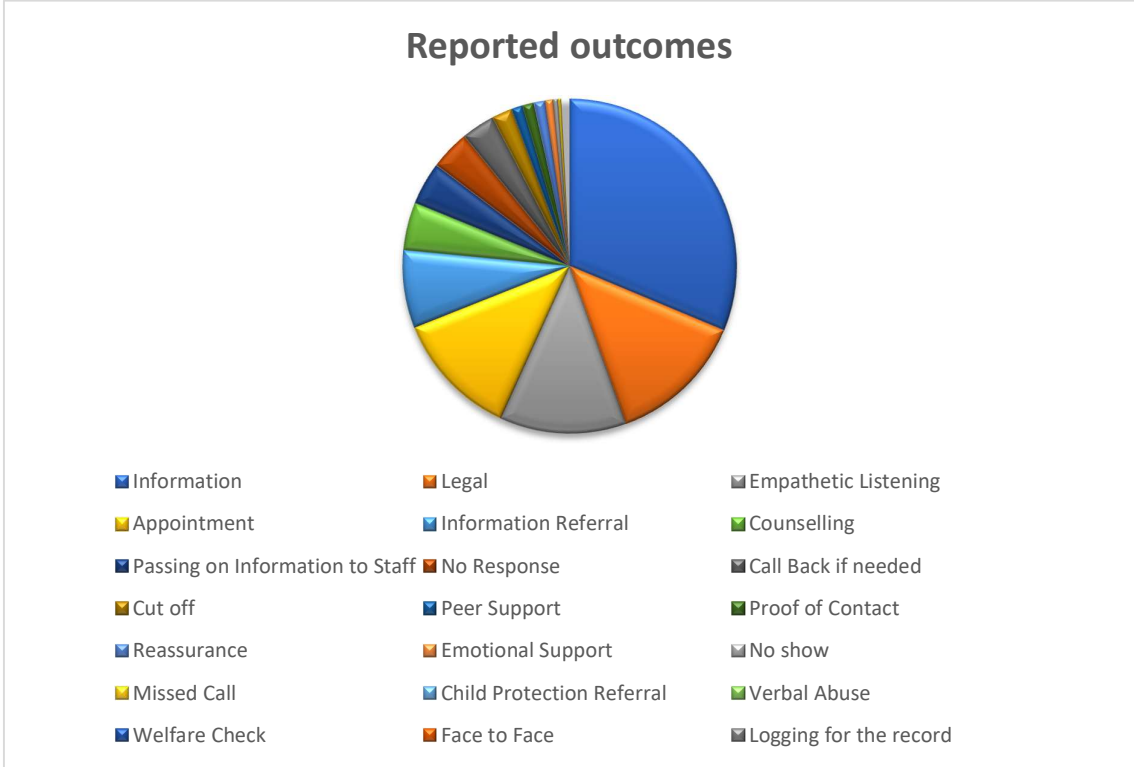
*I have been in a relationship for the last three years with a verbal, emotional, and physical abuser. We have a daughter together that is turning xx in a few weeks. I just don't know what to do....When we get on things are OK but she has a switch that flips and when it goes there is no stopping her. Shouting, hitting, manipulation, she prevents me from seeing my family and has totally isolated me. Then she has the nerve to call me an abuser. I have recorded her verbal attacks when I can. It's hard because they always blind side me. Last night after being hit 40 or so times I left and slept in the car. I went to the guards to talk about what to do. (Email ref 1432).*

#### **REPORTED OUTCOMES**

The outcomes and responses from Men's Aid Ireland were multimodal and there were several contact points for the men who contacted the service. For example, a man who emails the service may be offered a one-to one appointment or calls by service providers depending on the level of need. Also, a single caller can have multiple interactions (especially if the abuse was severe). The provision of information as documented by staff was over double that of any other outcome. This demonstrates the largest proportion of the work undertaken by Men's

Aid Ireland staff coupled with empathetic listening and legal related information provision. Most cases had multiple outcomes and extensive documentary analysis of this was evident. 21 specific outcomes were identified and are visually demonstrated below.

Figure 19: Reported outcomes



#### MEN’S WIDER VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCES – THE COMPLEX WEB OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS MEN

Whilst Men’s Aid Ireland is dedicated to men experiencing DVA in intimate relationships, there were wider victimization experiences reported illustrating a more complex picture of men’s abuse experiences and men’s access of the essential service provided by men’s aid Ireland. The following are examples of the types of victimization recorded.

#### Child to parent abuse

*xx told me he is living in Ireland for [over 30] years and his wife is verbally and physically abusing him. xx told me he feels he does not know what to do he also told me his daughter is physically abusing him also. I went through xxs options with him and suggested he contact Gardaí and also apply to the local district court to apply for a protection order I also gave xx empathic listening (Call ref. 2804)*

*Hello I’m writing to you today in regards of my [young adult] year old son, I’ve experienced years of mental and physical abuse from this person and the last time he assaulted me I made the decision for him to be put out, so he went to live with his mother but the abuse started there also and only last night he kicked in my back door and got into the house, my [teenage] daughter was in the house and I had to keep her safe, eventually the guards came and arrested him but after I went out this morning I*

*was informed that he snuck back into the house and is now in bed, I'm on a disability and I'm suffering bad and I need HELP please kind regards xx (email ref...2687)*

### **Parent to child violence**

*My husband has an order of protection against him [from his mother] which was done in court...His mother obtained an interim order of protection [making false accusations] in July. In family court in October, she admitted that he had never abused her in any way... all her allegations were found to be false, but she kept wailing and crying...I want to start a campaign for women like my mother-in-law who lie in statements to get some sort of penalty... Please help...' (email ref 2852)*

### **CONCERN FROM OTHERS**

Although the service is mostly accessed by men, evidence of contact and concern from others was identified. Here are some examples of individuals who contacted the service concerned for men.

### **Concerned parents and grandparents**

*xx told me her son xx is a very successful businessman who is in a relationship with a...woman who is physically, verbally and emotionally abusing her son. (call ref 2664)*

*xx said her son had has an acute [health problem]. xx said her son was in a [health] facility until his wife removed him. xx said her son's wife is physically and mentally abusive to him and is coercively controlling him. xx said the [health] centre had to call Gardai to the facility as her son's wife was abusing him. xx said her son is afraid for mother to visit as he said his wife might "punch" her. xx said her son is afraid of his wife and his wife has isolated him from friends. (one to one ref.1126)*

*xx rang with concerns for his son who has a child with a...lady and has been in and out of court for the last 3 years. xx told me his son is very vulnerable at the moment as this lady keeps breaching her court order for access to his grandson which is breaking his heart. xx told me this woman has had his son arrested for false allegation made false allegations against him through Tusla that were dropped. (Call ref 2673).*

### **Concerned adult children**

*I am emailing you to ask for advice regarding my father's home situation. He has been in an abusive marriage for last 30 years, both verbal and emotional abuse. Sometimes physical. My father never left this marriage because my mother would have ended up our sole carers which wasn't an option... There is peace in our house when she isn't there but when she is back everyone walks on eggshells to avoid being verbally abused...I would like to find out what I could do to help my father? ... Without him we wouldn't have gotten any love, care or education so now I want to help him (email ref. 958)*

### **Concerned siblings**

*(Accompanied by his sister) xx said he has been married for 40 years, and his wife is violent and abusive. xx said he has no access to bank accounts and his pension goes into his wife's account. xx said he was*

*isolated from his family and friends. xx said his wife attacked him with a knife in the past. xx said the violence has escalated since his wife retired two years ago. xx said he contacted his family last week and moved into a granny flat on the family property where his sisters live. xx said his wife told his grandchildren whom he adores that he is the worst grandfather and no good and this was the last straw for him and why he moved out (One to one 2593)*

### **Concerned colleagues**

*xx called about her concern for a work colleague. She spoke about how his wife drives him everywhere even though he's a bus driver and how his wife took his laptop and had to get a work laptop for training*

*Hi, I would be grateful if you could please contact me about a man (in his late 60s) that I am working with. He is very intimidated by his son, who calls to the house whenever he feels like it. His son has a key and is threatening towards him. He has previously threatened him with a hammer. This man has also been forced by his son to pay [large sum of money] for his son's drug debts. My client feels that his situation will get worse if he tries to involve the Gardai or if he tries to seek a barring order...He has previously made suicide attempts and continues to struggle with suicidal thoughts.... I would be grateful if you could please offer me advice to support him. (email ref 1133)*

### **Concerned professionals**

*I am contacting you on behalf of a client of mine and would appreciate some advice. I am a [Health and Social care Professional]. Without going into detail at this stage, I am supporting a male caring for his spouse and there seems to be an element of emotional control. With his permission I recommended getting him specific supports to deal with this element of his life as it is beyond my remit although I feel he would benefit from your service....(Email ref.1274)*

### **Concerned individuals**

*Sister's ex-partner who is being severely abused by his new girlfriend. xx said he is being beaten and his partner is recording the attacks. xx said she has the recordings of his partner calling him to come out of the bathroom and he says no I-m afraid. xx said when he does leave the bathroom he is covered in blood from the attack. xx said she has many recordings that his partner sent to her. xx said she spoke to him last night and he had attempted suicide, but the rope broke. (Call ref 2344)*

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The aim of this exploratory project was to understand the characteristics of calls and contacts to Men's Aid Ireland. The combination of two approaches has resulted in a wealth of data which not only makes visible the problem of male victimisation from female partners, but it also illustrates the multifaceted nature of the problem as well as the response.

The fact that almost all clients experienced multiple forms of DVA reflects the international literature in this area (Scott-Story et al 2023) highlighting that responses of the DVA experience for men need to be equally multifaceted (Bates and Douglas 2020). The prominence of psychological and emotional abuse as the most common form of DVA reported in both in the quantitative and qualitative findings resonates with much previous research in this area (Corbally et al 2023, Hine et al 2022) and highlights the pervasive nature of this kind of abuse. It is of note that this form of abuse has also been identified as the form which is most damaging in the long term (Watson and Parsons 2005). Although Men's Aid use emotional abuse in their definition, quite often the working definition of this theoretically similar to psychological abuse in contemporary research studies.

Second wave abuse as a phenomenon was initially identified in 2011 as abuse initiated by a female partner but not enacted by her (Corbally 2011). As a concept, this is relatively new in the field where DVA has used traditional classifications for years (such as Psychological, Physical, Sexual) (Krug et al 2002). However, evidence of its presence in research literature is growing (e.g. Kestell 2019, Callan 2023, Scott-Story et al 2023, Corbally et al 2023, Machado and Matos 2023) and its expansion in the text-based phase of this study is telling. This suggests that abusive women's capitalisation of systems (designed in the main to support women) and individuals to achieve advantage, power over and harm to a male partner is an important consideration for policy and practice. Indeed, evidence of the reverse (i.e. alleged male perpetrators) also evident in this study to a small extent, suggesting greater national attention to ensuring systems and processes are sensitive to this phenomenon is warranted.

Coercive control is also a relatively new (in theoretical terms) phenomenon in relation to DVA, being only enacted as a crime in Ireland relatively recently (Government of Ireland 2018). The fact that this study identified this in both forms of data suggests that this form of abuse is evident amongst a male population and reflects existing research in the area (Powney and Graham Kevan 2023). What is interesting about its emergence in this study was its presence not just in abusive relationships, but how it was exacerbated as a tool if a woman decided to end a relationship or to maximise advantage in court situations. Because the level of coercive control can be a determining factor in the severity of abuse and risk of severe sequelae, greater understanding of how this is captured by service providers across services is invariably needed.

Men contact services with a variety of needs and in a variety of living situations. Unpredictable living arrangements are associated with higher DVA risk (Bates and Taylor 2023) and services need to be responsive to these. The fact that men contact the service in

all phases of relationship, suggests that men are seeking information, legitimisation of their experience as well as support in crisis. This breadth of contact by men indicates that in spite of clear barriers that men face in help seeking (Bates et al 2023), the crucial interface men experience when contacting helplines and support services can be detrimental. Fathers face a particular challenge and have been identified in this study as having higher odds of certain abuses due to their status. The precarious situation of fathers who experience parental alienation (Bates and Hine 2023) with devastating consequences on their quality of life whilst also experiencing DVA highlights the ongoing challenges Men's Aid Ireland face when responding to fathers who given the findings, experience multiple harms.

Because men do prefer an option of anonymity when contacting helpline services (Bates and Douglas 2020), the decision to exclude task level data categorised as 'anonymous' was a difficult one as it is acknowledged that individuals in real difficulty may be hesitant to provide their details to support staff. It could be possible that these clients may be experiencing the most abuse given their hesitancy and this is a real concern and it is hoped that consideration be given to prioritising to a reference number/code to callers who choose to remain anonymous so that future analysis might be possible for these clients. Confidentiality of information is another essential aspect for victims (Hine et al 2022a). Thankfully, this appeared to be evident throughout in data as well as in all aspects of administering this research. In DVA practice, men constitute underserved populations (Bates and Douglas 2020, yet within this service more 'minority' groups emerged such as LGBTQ+, those with disabilities, language barriers, addiction issues, and immigration issues. Greater attention to this area is invariably warranted given the wide diversity of Irish contemporary society.

The crucial role of concerned others such as family, friends, and professionals has been identified as a key aspect of men's recovery in supporting men experiencing abuse cannot be underestimated as they are frequently the first point of disclosure and it is essential that concerned individuals are supported non judgementally and effectively (Corbally et al 2023, Hine et al 2022). The exposure of wider forms of male victimisation (such as child to parent, parent to child and sibling violence) though not in large numbers, perhaps paints a picture of a more complex victim experience whilst signalling limited support mechanisms for those experiencing different forms of family violence (Papamichail and McElhone 2023). It is consoling that all contacts to the service were effectively responded to and directed to the appropriate service.

Men's Aid Ireland undertake invaluable work with men who experience DVA. The goal of Men's Aid Ireland identified on their website is "to provide a targeted service meeting the needs of the male victim of Domestic Abuse & Coercive control. Our strategic pillars outline our commitment to achieving the aims of The Istanbul convention as ratified by Ireland in 2019. Underpinning this is the principle of meeting at least minimum standards for the Victim as set in The Criminal Justice (Victims of Crime) Act 2017 and this will be inextricably linked to The Third National Strategy 2022 – 2026 on Domestic Abuse which was launched on the 28th

of June 2022" ([www.mensaid.ie](http://www.mensaid.ie)). The fact that this research has identified that Men's Aid provide a multifaceted response, multi-modal response all clients with multiple and complex needs reflects that this service is broadly reflective of the existing evidence base for service provision (Bates and Douglas 2020, Hine et al 2022a, 2022b) is encouraging.

The findings presented in this study, provide two distinct but complimentary lenses by which the utilisation of Men's Aid Ireland by vulnerable men and their families can be understood. In achieving the aims of the study, the MENCALLHELP2 study provides essential information about typical call characteristics which illustrates the nature of DVA as articulated by callers.

The phenomenon of male victimisation is not new (Allen-Collinson, 2008, 2009; Morgan and Wells, 2016; Eckstein, 2010) neither is the fact that men are reluctant in seeking help (Courtenay, 2000; Noone and Stephens, 2008; ). However, this study has identified that in spite of this, many men are seeking help for DVA and are presenting with issues comparable with issues which have been identified internationally.

## CONCLUSION

Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) remains a serious societal problem. The MENCALLHELP 2 project explored in detail, the content, nature and characteristics of call data received by the Men's Aid National Helpline Service in an effort to make visible, the nature and characteristics of the phenomenon as it relates to the men and individuals who contact the service. Cuan, the Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence agency established in 2024 utilise meaning of Shining a light, Protection for all, Leading the way and Everyone welcome in their symbols pertaining to their letters (Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration 2024). The conduct and findings of this project are reflective of Cuan's sentiment in shining a light on the problem of male DVA victimisation as well as highlighting service provision and outcomes. We are hopeful that the impact and utilisation of the findings will increase protection for all who experience DVA and that this report leads the way for a greater understanding for all. In the spirit of the vision espoused by Cuan, welcoming all individuals, nurturing healthy and respectful relationships in research, practice and policy offers real and collective potential for enhanced understanding, improved evidence base and tailored responses for service providers to enhance the crucial work they do across the island of Ireland.

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